

前はマのつく 鉄格子!

喬林 知

Tomo Takabayashi Presents

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角川ビーンズ文庫

Kyou Kara Maou - Volume 16

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Novel Illustrations

Prologue



Day 0, opens eyes.

Day 0, feeds it mountain goat's milk. That's what little animal babies drink.

Day 0, Anissina says contemptuously, "Little animal babies can walk by themselves even without support." I reply, "What's wrong with supporting it a little?" But she answers, "That is overprotection." Leaving me lost for words.

"Animals naturally have the instinct and habits to survive. All they have to is observe quietly, and they'll emulate the way their parents walk. If you don't wait it out patiently, and insist on forcing them to develop before they're ready, all you're doing is wasting their natural abilities."

Therefore I ask her, what about little babies whose parents aren't there to teach them? Anissina says with the air of a know-it-all, "Then you just have to teach it yourself."

And so in front of the delicate little kitten, I put all my effort into a cat walk for it to observe.

Conrad catches me in the act.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

前はアのつく
鉄格子!



That's right, animals have a natural instinct, and that is to try and breathe as long as they're still alive—I'm no exception. Without waiting for my vision to clear, my mouth and nose are already desperately trying to breathe.

Oxygen and seawater assault my tongue at the same time, and the insides of my nose are stinging painfully, just like how it feels when I fail at diving in a pool full of chlorine. But although I can breathe, it feels like someone is pulling my collar from behind, which is why my constricted throat hurts so much.

What's the matter? What on earth happened? Oh, yeah, I fell into the sea.

Murata and I fell into the blue-black whirlpool that suddenly appeared between the waves.

Although I nearly drowned, I think I still held on tightly to that important friend of mine that I cannot be separated from no matter what. However, my friend's body in my embrace keeps flailing about.

"Mn—Hang in there, Murata, your injuries aren't serious at all."

Otherwise there's no way he would still be this energetic, and flailing about non-stop like that.

Hm? Flailing about?

I force my eyes open. I don't hesitate or hold back with it, instead using so much force it almost makes a shutter sound. But the dazzling sunlight and seawater sure hurt my eyes.

Silver skin and a neat, detailed mesh pattern appear in front of my eyes.

The one I'm holding on to so carefully isn't Murata, but a large bonito.

"What is this!? Why am I hugging a bonito!?"

"Hm... Although I wear glasses, I'm not Nakajima^[1], y'know..."

I want to look towards the direction the voice is coming from, but my head is fixed in place and can't turn properly. Even if I want to wave my legs, I can't move an inch be it forward or backward. And though my limbs can't move, my whole body is still swaying. I was about to ask why I feel so floaty, then I realize that we're caught in a fish net, and suspended in mid-air too. No wonder I feel that way.

Other than the bonito I'm hugging tightly, there are silver fish scales pressing on my back, front, left, right, brain and stomach. In conclusion, we've fallen into a fisherman's net together with a school of fish.

We're hanging in the fishing net directly above the fishing boat, looking down on the fishermen underneath us, but they're grinning from ear to ear at the rare harvest they got.

I've only had baseball on my mind for the past sixteen years, so although I experienced batting an out that got stuck in the net, I've never experienced

being trapped in a fishing net myself. No, wait a sec! I think I did get successfully caught in a bug net before, but that was just a game between children, after all.

On the other hand, getting pulled upwards together with fish in a net by fishermen is an experience I probably won't get again in this lifetime. I should say, if possible, I hope I'll never experience it again.

"Ah~~ How troublesome, if Aniki found out about this, he would definitely look down on me... He would surely say I'm a 'Human Sunfish'."

"Sunfish are a docile species of fish, and they get caught even if they noticed the net because they can't avoid it—Speaking of which, why are you hugging a bonito so tightly?"

"You're still asking me why?"

My arms are still wrapped around seafood until now.

But there's a reason I'm holding on so tightly. Not because I'm hungry, but because I must never get separated from Murata no matter what.

Murata and I jumped into the entrance of the Star Tour together from the sailing mazoku vessel. Although I've long since gotten used to this kind of commuting, the Star Tour is still a journey to a different world. Maybe I have to ask Ulrike or Miss Anissina to find out what combinations and devices allow us to fly to a different world.

And judging by my current condition, I don't have any elite humanoid flying robot or guardian fighter jet. Add that to the fact that we're guided by maryoku, moving in a space that isn't Earth or Shin Makoku, and the consequences could be irreparable if we got separated from our comrades.

So I have to hold onto him tightly! When we were engulfed by the rapid water, that's the thought that immediately came to mind.

And besides, I hadn't planned to return yet, it was Wolfram beside me that pushed us into the sea from the back, so even if it wasn't of our own volition, in the end we still fell down towards the blue-black whirlpool.

Just as Wolfram said, I know he did it completely out of kindness. He probably wishes I can return to Earth and sleep peacefully, eat Mom's cooking, then

recharge and rest up properly before returning to Shin Makoku. But in the end...

“This is very obviously not Japan.”

“I think so too, huh.”

Although that guy made such a decision to give us a push, if he finds out later that we didn't return to Earth, I sure hope he won't blame himself too much for it.

We're like animals caught in a trap and hanging from a tall tree, the people with hair and eye colors very unlike Japanese ones pointing at us from below. Their hair is brown, red-brown, red, even blonde. As for the fishermen's sun-baked skin, rather than the color of wheat, it looks more bronze.

Although we really hope this is Earth, it seems that wish isn't likely to come true. The proof is that I can understand what they're saying. If this were Italy or France on Earth, putting aside Murata for now, I shouldn't be able to understand what they're saying.

But after they got over their initial shock, their expressions are now turning to fury, while they yell things like 'No matter what you've gone overboard' and 'This is obstruction of fishing, getting more and more agitated as they go. 'Obstruction of defense' or 'obstruction of base-running' I hear a lot, but this is the first time I heard of 'obstruction of fishing'.

Even so, any fisherman in any world would be disappointed to find something they can't grill with salt or make sashimi out of trapped in the net they worked so hard to spread. I'm really sorry that today your harvest is made of high school boys.

“How troublesome~~ What if they ask us to pay damages for their fishing losses and net? The 'I don't understand what you're saying' excuse won't work, either.”

“Now isn't the time to be worrying about that.”

A deep, charismatic baritone sounds from beside my ear, almost making me jump,

“Gwendal!”

That is the oldest of the very similar three mazoku brothers, Lord von Voltaire Gwendal. He really likes the Bando dolphin keychain, but I can't be sure if he likes living bonito. That Gwendal is pulling my collar tightly from behind with his large hand, no wonder I'm having difficulty breathing sometimes.

"W-why is Gwendal here?"

"That should be my question."

When I finally turn around while straining my stiff muscles, I find that a frowning Lord von Voltaire is also trapped in the fishing net. Although hunks like him look handsome no matter what, the seaweed entangled in his hair does cost him a lot of points. Even if I say it as positively as I can, he still looks like a drunk salaryman.

"Watching the king... and His Eminence fall into the sea, which idiot would stay still and not do anything? That's why I dived into the sea without hesitation, planning to grab hold of you two..."

"But in the end you were sucked into the terrifying water currents? Sorry, it was our fault for dragging you into this."

"Dragging me into this?"

"Mn—The reasons behind it are very complicated."

"Let me explain, then!"

Murata says excitedly. I'm glad that you're so energetic, but our situation now is that moving one hair moves us all, so please spare me. As for the fishermen, they seem to have given up on today's harvest, so they start steering the ship back to the port, making our situation even more unstable.

"We fell into the sea in the evening, right?"

"Right."

"But now it's the middle of the day. See, the sun is way up high in the sky."

He puts his hand near his face, pointing at the sun above his head,

"Right? This means there's a time difference, so we're not anywhere near where we started. Unless we lost consciousness together, and drifted on the sea

for a whole night.

For all three of us to be unconscious on the sea from evening to the next day when the sun is blazing—doesn't seem too possible no matter how I think about it. Putting aside outsiders like Murata and I, Gwen is an excellent fighter, so something like that would never happen to him.

"My conclusion is that although we were preparing to return to Earth, there seems to have been some interference, and in the end Lord von Voltaire came along for the ride to somewhere far away but in the same world as Shin Makoku."

"But, by 'some interference', what do you..."

Gwendal clears his throat softly,

"...It wouldn't happen to be me, would it?"

"Ah~~ I think it shouldn't be you—"

Murata peels off the algae plastered to his cheek, and even takes a bit from that really salty-looking rim,

"Although it's just my guess, I think it may have been Shinou's doing. I think there's a high chance he would do something like this."

"Eh!?"

A deep voice instantly overlaps with the perfectly-pronounced voice. Although I'm really surprised, I didn't think Lord von Voltaire would be too.

Speaking of Shinou, he's something close to God to the mazokus.

What should I do? My friend, who may yet live for many years, suddenly said he heard the voice of God. Since he's a smart guy, even if the world is destroyed or threatened, there's no way he would be cheated by a strange cult.

The bonito in my arms seems to agree, flailing about non-stop.

But Gwendal expresses his interest one step ahead of me,

"You two spoke!? You and His Majesty Shinou!?"

"Mn—I'm not sure if we spoke or met."

“You two met each other!?”

He’s getting more and more farfetched, what do I do now? He actually said he met God? I patted my friend’s shoulder,

“Murata, it’s best not to talk about that sort of thing with others. Because everyone think God is unattainable.”

“You don’t have to advise me so solemnly, I won’t sell the news to the paparazzi.”

Such dangerous gossip, I think even ‘Tokyo Sports Paper’ doesn’t publish stuff like that anymore.

“You say you met God-Wouldn’t that have terrified you--?”

“Please! Shibuya, it’s not like he’s a ghost.”

Poor Gwendal, this seems to be a test for his previous religion. And his brow is creased even more tightly now, as he murmurs, “To think that other than the oracle priestess, there are others who can hear His Majesty Shinou’s voice.” By now I can’t be sure if he truly believes what Murata is saying anymore.

“Poor things, the mazoku have way too many dreams and hopes towards Shinou.”

“You can’t blame them, His Majesty Shinou’s position in Shin Makoku is just like a god. Like Pele place in your heart... Eh, is it Pele? Or Zico? Maradona?”

“It’s Beckenbauer!”

The fishing net trapping us tilts and sways. It seems that since the boat is about to enter the port, their steering angle is huge.

“Anyway, not long ago I met Shinou, it’s just that it’s hard to explain in concrete words.”

“Please don’t say it in concrete words, I’m really bad at sciences.”

“I think you’re bad at sciences and languages, all the development has gone to your limbs.”

In order to help me understand, Murata explains it to me in the same style as elementary school compulsory reading assignments.

The mystery of the pyramids and the secret of the Boxes.

The bespectacled adventurer Murata Ken, jumped through dimensions from Japan on Earth and into the pyramid. He used the theory that a piece of the Box and the Box itself would attract each other. But back then, Murata Ken had not jumped directly through the dimensions to the pyramid.

“Murata, I think you can use slightly harder words for sixth grade elementary students.”

“In the middle of the journey, I was pulled to the space he exists in.”

“What does that mean? Isn’t His Majesty Shinou dead?”

“He’s not really alive but neither is he dead. He used his own power to create a unique space, and his soul now exists there.”

“Then he really is a ghost...”

“No, ghosts don’t have the power to change the course of the world.”

“In that case, how would the soul you’re talking about change the course of the world?”

“He’ll send word to the priestess and have the people do his bidding, or he’ll use maryoku to get in the way of someone’s actions. Just like us now.”

So that’s it!

In other words, according to Murata’s speculations, the reason we can’t return to Earth successfully isn’t because Gwendal followed us down into the sea, but His Majesty Shinou’s soul used maryoku to prevent us from going back... But what good does it serve him to do that?

“Does His Majesty Shinou not want me to go back to Earth?”

A ray of light flashes past Murata’s slightly inaccurately-powered glasses, and he says solemnly,

“Maybe, that guy seems to be having some funny ideas.”

“Hey hey hey, don’t suspect a god-like guy just based on your instinct.”

“If you really want to put it that way, what about you who assumed he was a god just based on your instinct? How will you explain that?”

“Ugh, hm—”

He’s right.

“Someone in my memory said this, ‘It’s best not to deify His Majesty Shinou too much.’ He’s really good at fighting, but although he really loves the mazoku, he’s still a man who won’t be satisfied until he has everything under his control. Such as fame, authority... and also violent power. How could someone as petty as him be a god?”

“When you put it that way, it does seem like he’s not.”

“And his leadership charisma is really bothersome too.”

“You would think it’s bothersome! Because he’s a great king and at the same level as a god, of course it’s good that he has charisma! I mean, it should only be expected, right!? Like me, I’m all troubled because I’m not good enough in that area.”

“It’s bothersome precisely because his charisma overshadows the current Maou.”

My usually cheerful friend hits me over the head with those words, making me especially embarrassed. I have to take the words of someone who met Shinou for real seriously. Although I don’t know how he managed to get to his resting place, but this is the era where you could get to an alternate world by being flushed down the toilet, even if your wish to ‘go to an ancient tomb’ becomes ‘welcome to the world of my heart’, it’s nothing to be surprised about.

“But instead of leadership charisma, Shibuya wins by his passion and justice, now that’s not too bad either, is it? And anyone can tell that you don’t have any ulterior motive.”

“...it sounds like you’re saying I’m a catcher with no calls at all...”

If I really look like I have no plans at all for the rest of my life, that’d be really bad. No one would want to follow an empty-brained king.

“What’s so bad about that? You look like you’ll do exactly what you say, at the very least you’re much better than that guy who collects dangerous items for his own interests.”

“Baseball cards aren’t dangerous, y’know.”

“Not baseball cards, Boxes.”

Having gotten everything off his chest at once, Murata sighs heavily, his expression spelling out ‘to think my own people are being idiots too, at this rate the problem won’t be easy to solve’.

“By ‘Boxes’, do you mean that!?”

“That’s right. That guy, in other words His Majesty Shinou is planning to collect all the Forbidden Boxes. Although he can’t do it.”

“Don’t tell me His Majesty Shinou really wants to—to the Forbidden Boxes!?”

Completely confused, Lord von Voltaire can’t help but interrupt as well,

“His Majesty Shinou’s plan is to gather all the Boxes in Shin Makoku?”

“Strictly speaking, he wants to keep them by his side, he hopes to control all the Boxes and Keys. Because he’s a man who will only rest when he has everything under his control. Those Boxes could be called the proof that he sealed the soushu, to Shinou they’re like trophies showing off his past achievements. Although they’ll cause a disaster if they’re opened by accident, even though to us they’re terrifying and low grade souvenirs, to him they’re toys that make people tremble in their boots. He wants to make it so they can be activated at any time, and then keep them by his side.”

“Collect? It can’t be, right?”

My friend wants to wave away my muttering, but he can’t move because his fingers get hooked on the net,

“No, in order to protect his reputation I must admit, he doesn’t plan on using the Boxes, that will really tick him off. Because he wants everything to be in his control.”

“But Ulrike didn’t...”

“That’s right. As long as the oracle announces the sacred decree of the god-like His Majesty Shinou, all the people of Shin Makoku would most likely obey that order. If he ordered to gather all four Boxes in this country, even if their hearts are full of questions, they would probably obey anyway. The fact is he didn’t

make his intentions known, so forget ordering them to be gathered, I even wanted to bury the Forbidden Boxes.”

“I’m guessing he didn’t mention this to the oracle, or to anyone at all. In other words, to him, the current situation at least is beyond his expectations.”

“Does he think it’s easier for people to find the Boxes based on their own imagination? Or could it be because...”

Maybe it’s because I swallowed some air together with my saliva, so my throat makes a strange noise.

“...I wanted to throw away the Boxes?”

“Maybe. I don’t know, maybe it’s not just because of that.”

Murata shakes his head lightly,

“But you don’t have to do according to his wishes.”

The fishing vessel successfully enters the port, and I hear the heavy sound of the ship going across the surface of the water. That sound incites my imagination—‘If the Boxes that breed disasters were to sink into the sea, would they make that sort of noise?’ But that’s just the sound of the ship setting anchor at the jetty.

Sorry, but I still want to throw it away.

I murmur to myself, telling the absent His Majesty Shinou.

I want to sink that to the bottom of the sea.

“You just have to do what you want to.”

Murata nods lightly,

“But if you want me to give you a suggestion, each Box has a ‘resting place’ suited uniquely to itself.”

“Resting place?”

“Mn, you could see it’s a place to keep them, or to throw them away. In any case, it’s a place where the soushu sealed inside will lose their power forever. Even if the best course of action now is to sink them to the bottom of the sea where no one can reach them, I still hope to bury them in those places in the

end.”

“But Murata, do you know where those places are?”

“The hints are right there in their names.”

The names of the Boxes are ‘Wind’s End’, ‘End of the Earth’, ‘Inferno in the Tundra’ and ‘Mirror’s Depth’, separately.

“It sounds to me like none of them exist.”

“I think so too. There isn’t a place in this world where the wind stops, if the planet of this world is round... it shouldn’t possibly not be round... In that case we won’t know where the ends of the earth are either, and there can’t possibly be a tundra where an inferno burns.”

“Besides, the one that’s like a mirror isn’t the water’s depth, but the surface, right? Exactly, it’s precisely because those are four places that couldn’t possibly exist, that’s the only way the Boxes can lose their power.”

“In other words, no matter what we have to find these places?”

“Don’t worry, I already have some ideas.”

Murata looks very happy, but Gwendal hasn’t said a thing the whole time. He’s very intelligent, and extremely experienced too, so he should be contemplating things even further after that.”

“But as for the danger right now...”

My friend narrows his eyes behind those lenses,

“It’s the possibility that your beloved Lord von Bielefeld might be a Key.”

“Wolfram... I remember now, you said before not to let Wolf approach that Box, right?”

“That’s right, didn’t I mention it? The Keys to the Boxes will show up on someone in those four clans respectively. Well, instead of clans, I should say on close blood relations. Because it may also show on their relatives from their mother’s side.”

“Do two of those Keys belong with the current Weller clan and the Voltaire clan?”

Hearing Gwendal's angry question, Murata retorts instinctively,

"How did you know?"

"Because there was that incident with Conrad's arm, and someone related to me by blood also lost an eye to one of the Boxes."

"That's right, and unfortunately these people were all very close to the real Keys, as in they may have been born just a few hours apart. We'll know if we just investigated their birthdays, but unfortunately..."

Gwendal narrows one eye and forces out the words, as though it was his face that was burned,

"Because mazoku don't place any importance on birthdays, we don't keep detailed records."

"That's right, and that's a bad habit as well, y'know!"

No wonder Murata would sound so upset.

"That's why we can't predict exactly who the Keys are, and the only one with all the information is that calculating Shinou. If you had the habit of recording births in detail, we could look at the day the previous owner of the Key died and choose a child that may have that person's soul."

"Hm? In that case, the moment the previous owner of the soul dies, the next person will use that soul again?"

"In theory if no one else tries to keep the soul somewhere, that's how it goes. But if the Box doesn't do anything, most of the people who were chosen to be Keys would live their whole lives without knowing their own importance. And then among the two remaining Keys..."

"Is the Bielefeld bloodline, right?"

Gwendal frowns,

"As I thought."

"Eh? That means all three of you brothers are!?"

"Calm down a little, Shibuya. That just means that the bearer of the Key was born in their clan, it doesn't mean that all three of them brothers are Keys. Only,

unfortunately, Lord Weller... seems to be it.”

I think back to the time when Conrad’s arm ‘almost opened’ one of the Forbidden Boxes.

“But in one sense of the word, it’s lucky he’s aware that he’s a Key. And he would try his best to make sure he didn’t get too close to the Boxes, so he might even be able to control the power of the soushu when push comes to shove.”

“Just ‘might’?”

“Then I’ll switch it to he can control it properly. As long as he still keeps his senses at that time.”

“And he even has to keep his ‘senses’?”

But when faced with such an insane threat, I think no one would be able to keep their senses.

“You could say we were lucky that time in Caloria, because not only was the Key different from the Box, the Key itself wasn’t whole either, so it all ended in an instant, and the damage was kept at such a minimum.”

“That’s right, I mean, that can’t be right. Didn’t you say that if it’s the first Key, even if the effect doesn’t match, it will still affect all the Boxes?”

“I did say that.”

“What does that mean?”

“Just as I said, the triggering mechanism is very simple. Because it’s simple, it can open all of the door slightly. But even so, it can open slightly. Add that to the fact that it’s just the arm of the wielder, and that’s why it would burn out in an instant. No, it didn’t really burn out. But think about it, that was left arm. As a part of the body, isn’t that a considerably simple and easy part to use?”

Then who does the left arm Conrad is using so freely now belong to?

Asking ‘who’ seems strange, because after all someone else’s arm shouldn’t be able to become your own. Although I can’t understand the overly complicated things, but without the most advanced medical techniques to perform a transplant, that shouldn’t be possible, right?

In that case, could it be a prosthetic limb? Or a convenience store item that operates with convenient majutsu? But Conrad doesn't know majutsu, the possibility that it's a ma-powered device isn't high.

Just like that I'm stumped, and I can't ask him either. Because Murata's next words weigh down heavily on our hearts.

"If it's just the arm, you won't have to worry about losing your life."

"Don't..."

I have no choice but to take a breath before continuing,

"Don't tell me the other Keys are even more dangerous?"

"That's right. Because they were designed to be even more closely tied to the soul and body. Maybe it'll be easier to understand if I explained it according to the process."

Even though he's the one speaking, Murata might also be feeling the pain, because his gaze moves downwards,

"When we created the first Key, we also repented on it. That's why the other three Keys had to be more closely tied to the soul and life. That's also why, the relationship between the Box and the Key, as well as between the Key and the power became tighter, and in the end only one Key would react with one Box. Theoretically, at the same time the disaster is released, it can be controlled."

"That was what the ancestor of your soul and Shinou did."

My friend raises his solemn face, staring at me steadily. His gaze on me is full of confusion, as though I said something weird.

"That's right, isn't it? Did I say something wrong?"

"...You didn't say anything wrong. That's right, it's just as you said. It wasn't me, but my soul... the person who owned my soul a long, long time ago who did it, ha~~"

The reason the end of Murata's sentence sounds weird is because the net trapping us sways violently from side to side, and our bodies move in tandem. Being suspended in mid-air and swinging violently makes us so unstable we can't help but scream.

“Waa-yea! Waaaaa!”

“Ahaha—It feels like we’ve become prizes in a claw machine!”

“Then what about the last Key?”

I didn’t think Gwendal would stay so calm, pushing Murata to continue talking even under these circumstances.

“Who is the last Key?”

“The last Key? Oh—It’s Wincott! But you don’t have to worry about that now, because ‘Mirror’s Depth’ isn’t in this world!”

When Murata says that in a manner as though yelling, the bottom of the net that had been wrapping us tightly suddenly gives way, so the three of us end up flying through the sky. Although we brace for impact, either luckily or unluckily we land on a heap of fish, so our bodies don’t hurt, but we’re covered from head to toe in silver scales and sticky slime.

My friend closes one eye as he wipes away the scales sticking to his lenses with his hand,

“It was sent to Earth. The first owner of my soul betrayed His Majesty Shinou.”

“Betrayed His Majesty Shinou?”

I ask carefully. Because according to the prime minister-cum-my royal instructor Lord von Christ Günter, did the ancestor of Murata’s soul, the Daikenja get along very well with His Majesty Shinou?

If he betrayed His Majesty Shinou, then aren’t things really bad?

“Their opinions differed, plus both of them were very childish, so it became a situation where neither would give to the other.”

“In that case, it’s not so bad. The problem is you said that great character who wouldn’t give in to God is very childish, now isn’t that going a little too far? They were the great people who established the mazoku country, after all.”

“There’s no such thing, the two of them aren’t as great as people think. I don’t know how the descendants exaggerated things, but I hope you’re not too scared.”

Murata finishes saying those words that would definitely make Günter faint, and then tosses his head vigorously, shaking loose a ton of fish scales and water droplets from his long-ish hair.

In any case, we've escaped the fishing net. I glance at Gwendal, trying to figure out what he plans to do next, but he's just sitting there motionlessly in the fish pile, pressing his index finger to his brow, which is even more creased than usual.



Even though he's cracking his head over me, the rookie Maou, I figure he's long since gotten used to that, so it should be the new Earthling he just met that brought him too much excitement. It's no wonder, after all the brat that he's facing now actually treats Shinou, the one who's treated as a religious symbol, like a friend. Since he's naturally strict, he must really be at a loss now.

If I told him now that Murata is only sixteen years old, I wonder how he would react. Although Murata keeps talking about all these ancestor stories, his own life experience is only sixteen years long, like mine.

“Waa—But my whole body reeks of fish~~ I feel like cat food—”

“On the other hand, Murata, I wanna ask you a strange question.”

“What question?”

“Does Shinou look a lot like Wolfram?”

“Does he look like Lord von Bielefeld? About that... How should I put this~~”

Murata's expression is saying 'what kind of a question are you asking so randomly' as he takes off his glasses and considers. As for me, I just want to know what kind of an impression he gives off to people, so I can prepare myself in case we meet one day. But this is also because of your 'don't be too scared' line just now.

“I think Lord von Bielefeld is a lot cuter than him—”

“Is that so?”

At least now there's a lower chance of the danger that I would shirk away in fear when facing a pretty boy that's too pretty.

1. [↑](#) From the long-running manga 'Sazae-san', Nakajima Hiroshi is best friends with Isono Katsuo, and apparently 'katsuboshi' is the name for bonito flakes... These puns X'D

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

In Blood Pledge Castle where the Maou of Shin Makoku stays, there is a portrait of the great ancestor of the mazoku, His Majesty Shinou and the Wise Sage who was always by his side supporting him.

One of them has shining golden hair, staring in front of him with brilliant blue eyes, while the other had jet-black hair draped over his shoulder, staring at his people and his king proudly with those equally black, intelligent eyes... Although such an explanation is attractive to the art experts in the years that followed, the true situation remains unknown.

After all, this painting was done long after the Sage disappeared from Shin Makoku, and His Majesty Shinou also left the world of his own accord, sealing himself into the Shinou Shrine—done at a time when no one in the castle had ever seen Shinou’s true face, in fact.

And even more unfortunately is the fact that Shinou was of the opinion that “stuff like portraits can be done after we’ve croaked”, so there were only a few rough sketches to go by. Apparently, the palace only provided those sketches and asked the artist to draw the king he would never again have the chance to meet.

The palace painter back then, Etienne, cracked his head over it, completely at a loss.

After cracking his head over it, he finally figured out – “Get those people who saw Shinou with their own eyes before here, and ask them how His Majesty Shinou looks like. Or bring all the servants here, there should be about ten of them who could be of use” plan.

This is what later became known as the ‘montage’ method.

So the painter summoned all the elderly who had retired back one by one, asking them how His Majesty Shinou looked like. But of all the previous servants, only one out of twenty-four was of any help.

The 'montage' was quickly morphing into something else. Disappointed, Etienne left Blood Pledge Castle and went underground.

But he wasn't a painter who lived quietly underground. Instead, he was a so-called fanatic who would draw as many paintings as you wanted as long as the request was rational and the reward substantial. Not only could he make the impossible possible, he was also a man who could complete a giant portrait. So he immediately started questioning the only servant who was any good.

Hmm~~ Shinou's eyebrows were very manly and majestic, his blue eyes weren't too big or too small, his eyelashes are gold like his hair, not long or short either. Etienne continuously adjusts Shinou's features according to the old man's testimony.

Darn, his features became totally unnatural.

So he summoned all the blonde young men in the country, called a few to stand in front of a wall at a time, and asked the old man to look at them from the next room over.

"I think Number 134 and Number 759 are the most similar."

Surprisingly, the old grandpa's memory is pretty good.

"And then Number 280 and Number 422 are really similar too, only the colors of their eyes is different."

And he is very observant about the details too.

"Number 15's chest is really awesome, huh."

Looks like he's also very strong for his age.

Thanks to the success of this plan, Etienne managed to figure out Shinou's features roughly, so all that's left had to be left to the artist's imagination. As for the Wise Sage, since he couldn't find anyone with the same hair and eye color, ninety percent of it was the painter's imagination.

Rumor says that when the palace painter once yelled, "Thank goodness I have a thing for black hair!" when he completed the painting, and then fell down the stairs.

Just like that, thanks to the hard work and delusions of a palace painter, the

portrait of His Majesty Shinou and the Wise Sage was finally completed. Putting aside whether it actually looked like them or not, the piece was hung on a wall and greatly praised by the people of Shin Makoku, the artist even more so. Not only did they compliment him for a job well done, they even paid him so much he didn't have to worry about money for the rest of his life.

After all, he's the specialist painter, Etienne, who challenged the irrational portrait, is trustworthy and at the same time utterly unpredictable in his tracks. If you want to get a colored portrait done, just look for him.

It's only too bad that Lady von Karbelnikoff Anissina hadn't been born yet back then. If she heard of this plan, she may have immediately started inventing a magic-powered image-capturing device.

Even if the palace's specialist painter suffered quite a bit at one point, the secret behind the production of His Majesty Shinou's portrait still couldn't be made public.

The prime minister back then considered that if everyone found out His Majesty Shinou's rare and precious image is based on two aristocrats, two commoners, and one guy who got his costumes messed up's random drawings, the people would probably be devastated, so he ordered everyone related to keep it secret.

It's been a few thousand years since then, and now no one knows what happened behind the scenes anymore.

Now when the people working in Blood Pledge Castle, as well as the dogs and young boys who get permission to enter, look up at the portrait, they will sigh things like "how beautiful and how majestic" or "why do I suddenly feel so tired".

Sometimes someone would mention that His Majesty Shinou as seen in the masterpiece looks a lot like someone. People like Spitzweg or Bielefeld get mentioned a lot, and number one among them is Lord von Bielefeld Wolfram. "Mn..." Although His Majesty Shinou's portrait is in Blood Pledge Castle, Wolfram, who is said to look a lot like Shinou, is still on the sea. He supports his delicate chin with his fair finger, feeling frustrated on the ship Sizemore leads, 'Friends on the Sea'.

“In that case, that means Brother went to the world Yuuri grew up in...”

“That spiraling scene must have been the entrance to transport His Majesty, it must have been! Otherwise why wouldn’t the soldiers that immediately jumped in have found them, or even any clothes or glasses? And that whirlpool! It disappeared as soon as it swallowed the three of them, so it must have been waiting for His Majesty to jump in.”

And Lord von Christ Günter, who agrees with everyone that he has a thing for double blacks, is also there.

“You thought so too, that’s why you pushed His Majesty into the sea, right. If that’s not the case...”

The man known as the super beauty’s face clearly says “I wanna hit you”, but Wolfram doesn’t care. Compared to Brother’s ‘that’, Günter’s iron fist dictatorship is nothing to him.

Instead, he’s really worried for Gwendal, who jumped into the sea after Yuuri and Murata. Surely he couldn’t have actually gone to Earth with them, could he?

“Goodness—how could this have happened! Wolfram, why did you push Gwendal back then and not me!?”

“I didn’t push Brother, he jumped down himself. If you really wanted to go that bad, why didn’t you jump down yourself?”

“How could I jump, back then I was still holding Gurrier, since Gwendal asked me to take care of him.”

Günter looks up at the ceiling unhappily, the hair beside his face falling lightly onto his face. Although his actions are childish, it still looks really beautiful.

“I can’t abandon my post and jump into the ocean of my own accord. But if it was an accident, if it was an accident...”

“So what would you do if it was an accident? Don’t tell me you would abandon your post?”

Günter doesn’t answer the young soldier’s serious question, murmuring to himself as though he hadn’t heard,

“I really wanna see the world His Majesty grew up in... go to where His Majesty

grew up... 'Ears'."

Of course at this time no one would pay attention to the fact that he got the name wrong.

"You probably want to follow and see as well, huh, Wolfram?"

"I'm still okay."

"There you go again, you're always so stubborn with your words."

"I'm not being stubborn, I really never thought of going to the world where Yuuri grew up."

"Sometimes you don't have to force yourself so much, y'know, Wolfram."

Günter's gaze is condescendingly saying 'you were just like a pouting brat just now'.

Usually, Wolfram, being as obstinate as he is, should probably be about to explode by now. But instead he crosses his arms in front of his chest and straightens his back, his attitude not only matter-of-fact but also full of self-confidence as he retorts,

"I'm not forcing myself! To Yuuri and me, it doesn't matter what kind of world he grew up in, it doesn't change the fact that Shin Makoku will always be the best!"

With that, even Günter, who's always good with his words, can't say anything.

"There's no country better than this, and I believe Yuuri thinks the same. Once his body gets used to it, he would probably want to stay here all the time, right?"

The prime minister who had been considering whether or not to put "what is patriotism?" into the compulsory education textbooks slaps his knees out of instinct, saying, "That's exactly it!" But the fact that the one to suggest it is Wolfram makes him feel rather unwilling to admit it.

And why does his heart tremble this way? Is it jealousy? The benefits of being a teacher? Or could it be love? If it was the third one, that would be bad, so he quickly clears his throat and acts calm,

"Such model words are pretty good, Wolfram."

“Huh? Hey, what are you trying to do?”

Günter puts his right hand on Wolfram’s cheek, his left hand plastered onto his own stomach. Although he really wants to ask why Günter is comparing with his stomach, it’s already much better than Gisela, who measures healthy soldiers’ temperatures through their anuses.

Even though they’re all mammals, but people aren’t cats or dogs. Even the soldiers who can tolerate pain would cry silent tears.

“Mn~~ You don’t have a fever.”

“How rude!”

“Because your words are too exemplary, it’s making me a bit uneasy. How strange, you’re obviously not that impressive a child, unless something happened on the long journey... Ah!”

As though something occurred to him, Günter reaches his right hand into Wolfram’s pocket before he could be batted away, pulling out a bundle of grey at lightning speed. ‘That thing’ hanging from the neck is a square object about the size of a palm, an amulet made of one hundred percent hair.

That’s ‘Günter’s Protection’, the thing that sealed Wolfram’s maryoku so he wouldn’t feel weak even on shinzoku land filled with shinryoku. But it’s a bit moist, as though still emitting the scent of the sea, which makes its effects even more intriguing.

“Ah! Hey, give that back to me! Gimme back--!”

“So it is because of this!?”

Wolfram hurriedly snatches the amulet back from Günter’s hands.

“You’re using that ‘Günter’s Protection’ to transfer my personality and wisdom unto yourself, aren’t you!? That’s the only reason you can say such exemplary, manly words.”

“No, no! Even if I don’t rely on something like this, I will grow^[1]!”

“Then why haven’t you returned it to me? And why is your big tongue acting up again?”

“T-that... Anyway, this amulet! I’m borrowing it until we return to Shin Makoku!”

He evidently hated it in the beginning, but since he started wearing this amulet, his old seasickness started to fade slowly as well. If it’s a large vessel that doesn’t sway too much, he’s already able to ride it safely without getting sick. To think that such a moist and disgusting pouch could actually replace seasickness medicine. Although it’s a bit embarrassing, it’s still best if he could ride on a boat comfortably.

But Wolfram thinks rather uneasily, “Hold on a sec!”

If what Günter said is true, and his maturity that Yuuri pointed out is all due to this disgusting pouch... then if he returned it to Günter, does that mean he’ll return to what Mother meant by ‘it’s okay as long as you stay like you originally were forever’?

However, the hesitation in Wolfram’s heart is interrupted by the person who opened the door.

“You two!”

That tone is like a teacher scolding children.

The person who came in is Günter’s adopted daughter, the brilliant medical officer, Demon Sergeant Lady von Christ Gisela. Today she doesn’t have to deal with stinking men, so she’s in a smiley mazoku-in-white mood.

Her expression says “I can’t stand these people” as she raises her eyebrow deliberately,

“Your Excellency Günter, it’s really unbecoming for an elder to take back something that was given, you know. And the same goes for Your Excellency Wolfram.”

Those slightly pale fingers grab their hands, and take the pouch that was on their heads away. Gisela puts the disgusting amulet with hair poking out everywhere on the bed,

“Please don’t argue over a one hundred percent hair item such as this.”

“Gisela, you should call me (Adopted) Father.”

“It’s not like we’re alone together now, and besides we’re on duty, Your Excellency. Speaking of which, you two were the ones who decided to put Gurrier on public display, weren’t you?”

“What do you mean, public display...”

“How is that any different from having an open ward?”

Only Günter’s high-level majutsu could handle Gurrier Josak, who was left to them by Gwendal.

At the same time when the ship reached the open seas, he put Josak, whose living functions were about to shut down, in a state of suspended animation, and finally managed to calm him down.

It’s just that back then there were only Josak and Günter in the room alone, and everyone promised not to peek no matter what, so even though all they could hear were strange noises (probably from Günter), chest-beating and foot-stomping (probably from Günter) and weeping (probably from Günter), Gisela, Wolfram, the captain Sizemore and the million-job man aka Günter’s personal officer Dacascos were all asked to leave the room.

Only the stars peeping in from the window know what happened in that not-too-large ship cabin. The two grown men continued with their ominous, mysterious ritual until the moon was hanging high in the night sky.

Exhausted, Günter finally appeared from behind the door.

His eyes were bloodshot, his hair was a mess, and there were even bright red slap-marks on his cheeks.

Don’t tell me he hit himself? Although everyone was thinking the same thing, no one dared to say it out loud.

Even Gisela couldn’t help but wonder if her adopted father isn’t an expert in majutsu, but instead an expert in curses.

Anyway, he lay Josak, successfully put into suspended animation, into a wooden crate stuffed full with ice. This was the difficult process he had to go through before he was handed over to Anissina. An expert in poison and majutsu, Anissina would surely find a way to wake the zombified Gurrier Josak up

again.

Since the wooden crate and ice cubes were initially kept in the storeroom, it's unavoidable that they would smell of fish and blood, so Josak's body now reeks of gore. Thankfully he's not a vegetarian, but even so Günter feels sorry for him, and so he lets his face up a bit for a breather.

Although it's true that they prepared these things last minute, they still feel really guilty for putting him a wooden crate that was used to store fish. If he dreamed, he would probably have no choice but to dream of a rendezvous with maidmers.

To express a certain degree of apology, Gunter tries to install pink-colored lighting in the freezer to cheer him up.

To think that, goodness~~ How could something like this happen? Even though he's no match for Adalbert, Josak still has those biceps that His Majesty Yuuri envies, so the serene atmosphere makes him look just like the 'Sleeping Hunk' in the fairy tales!

If he were to wake up, he would surely hope that everyone around him could see the way he's illuminated by the beautiful lights. With that in mind, Günter opened the door to the next room, at the same time thinking, "When night falls, the pink lighting shining on the deck will surely be beautiful."

But Gisela, who ran here after noticing what he had done, frowns as soon as she enters the room,

Thinking, "Why does this have the atmosphere of a country club stripper performance!?" And even feeling as though she was tricked.

"Publicly displaying an unconscious patient is a very senseless thing to do."

"I thought that since the pink lighting is so pretty, maybe Gurrier would want everyone to see it."

"Are you talking about that low-grade lighting?"

He is immediately put down—Lord von Christ had put his heart and soul into that décor.

"I have already locked the room door. But rather than leave him out for public

admiration, why don't you use the high-speed raft to send him back to Shin Makoku as soon as possible?"

"A body in suspended animation can't withstand that pressure. If he were to get injured from the tremors of the high-speed raft, it would decrease the value of the body."

"If he requires such careful treatment, why doesn't His Excellency stay by his side?"

By now Wolfram can only stare in amazement as the daughter in reversed roles lectures her adopted father. Even if it's the adopted father she respects, as a medical officer Gisela simply cannot tolerate his actions.

Although she can't tell if Günter healed him using majutsu or voodoo, from the perspective of a medical officer at least, Gisela seems to be extremely indignant,

"When Your Excellency was still Snow Günta, His Excellency Gwendal stayed by your side. He even put a snow rabbit on your important parts."

"Don't tell me you want me to do that too?"

"I have already put a swan ice carving on Gurrier's crotch."

Gisela says decisively. Although it sounds cold just listening about it, Wolfram still decides in his heart that he must go see that later.

"But Gisela, other than Josak, we have another important task."

"What task?"

Günter doesn't reply, only glancing at the corner of the room. There's a cuboid object covered with a cloth there. Gisela claps her hand over her mouth despite herself, holding her breath,

"That couldn't be..."

"It is."

The pale blue cloth is covering a rectangular box just slightly shorter than a coffin, but it's 1.5 times as deep as a coffin. Its size means it would take at most two strong adults to carry it with ease. Even though it isn't revealed to the public, its ominous aura can still be felt around the room.

That is one of the Four Forbidden Boxes, 'Inferno on the Tundra' that was taken out from Seisakoku.

"It's on the ship!? Wasn't it in the cabin of the other ship?"

"That's right, it was at the bottom of the guard vessel. But it can't always be there."

"Why?"

"Because we need to make a decision."

Since Wolfram, who was staring at the Box from more than five paces away, has spoken, Günter continues on,

"His Majesty hopes to sink this Box to the bottom of the sea. Isn't that right, Wolfram?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Personally, I feel that since 'Wind's End' is currently kept safely in Shin Makoku, it would put my heart at ease if this 'Inferno on the Tundra' is also left where we can see it. However..."

"However Yuuri said he hopes to not bring it into Shin Makoku, and Mura... His Eminence agreed."

"To think His Eminence thinks so too? Since the great His Eminence said that, then it is obviously our proper course of action... But even if we want to sink it into the sea, the exact location on this ocean is another problem."

"He said he doesn't want anyone to find it, so it has to be in a place fishing boats won't pass."

Of course at that time Gisela doesn't know that those three in a faraway ocean are currently being held in a fishing net.

"Even so, we can't abandon in an outer ocean with nothing to do with Shin Makoku either. Besides, if one day we want to retrieve it, we can't not know where it was sunk. Therefore we must have a precise destination in mind, a place where we can measure its depth."

"But Your Excellency, do you think His Majesty would possibly use a Box he

threw away again?”

“You have a point.”

Günter pushes the hair on his face behind his eyes, revealing his violet eyes.

As they’re seriously discussing where to discard the Box, a corner of Wolfram’s brain is using the part that can’t think properly to daze off.

Violet eyes represent the bloodline of the lakeside tribe with powerful maryoku. Maryoku... Speaking of which, could it be that his own sealed maryoku has returned to his body since the amulet was removed? But he can’t feel the change at all... And he doesn’t suddenly feel seasick either...

Wolfram suddenly finds it hard to breathe, so he tries to swallow, but something seems to be stuck in his throat, completely unbudging.

“...Wha...”

Leaning against the wall, he slowly raises the arms crossed in front of his chest, the tips of his fingers steadily moving towards the Box. The bottom of his feet are numb, he can no longer tell if he’s standing still or walking.

Gisela looks at him with an expression of surprise,

“Your Excellency?”

Wolfram forces out the words,

“Everyone is telling me not to get close, not to touch that Box no matter what. But...”

“Wolfram, what’s the matter with you?”

“Yuuri forbids me from touching it, why?”

He wasn’t ordered to or anything, but his limbs are numb as though under pressure, his shaking fingertips still obeying his brain’s orders. He uses his tips of his right hand fingers to touch the cloth covering the Box, feeling the numbness reach his heart.

“Why can’t I touch this Box?”

“Didn’t you say yourself that it’s because you might be the Key? His Majesty and His Eminence said so too.”

“That’s right.”

Wolfram reconfirms it solemnly.

“Am I being controlled? No, my body isn’t going against my brain, I’m moving according to my own intentions, I’m alive.”

“But if I were the Key, I should be able to handle the Box even more safely, right?”

“But His Majesty would rather throw it away than use it live on something else?”

“Use it live? That’s right, we should use it better live.”

The distance of five paces is now only half a pace. Right now he’s holding ‘Inferno on the Tundra’, and could release it at any time.

“I should have objected. When Yuuri said he wanted to throw it away, I should have objected with everything I had.”

Because a part of this Forbidden Box is...

“Your Excellency Wolfram, please forgive my insolence!”

“...Mmagg!”

After making a noise like drinking full malt wine, Wolfram’s body starts moving. He is pushed by a fearsome power to the wall beside the Box.

Gisela meant to grab his chest, but in the end it became a throat lock. The right hand she’s using to subdue Wolfram is covered with a glove up to her forearm. The glove covered with dense thick hairs, so it looks rather disgusting.

But although the woman known as the Demon Sergeant is sweating from her temples, she smiles bravely,

“Phew, to think that the convenience tool the Poison Lady stuffed at me would come of use at a time like this.”

“G-Gisela? Your arm, that furry glove is...”

Instead, her adopted father Günter seems panicked.

The Sergeant’s right hand has become the front limb of a wild mountain beast.

“According to what Anissina said, this is ‘As Long As I’m Wearing This, No Matter How Weak My Strength Is, My Business Will Boom’, its product name is ‘Ahh Even The Bear’s Paw Wants to Borrow’, while I personally call it ‘Bear’s Paw’.”

After shortening it, the name becomes unexpectedly normal, but her attention is elsewhere. Because she remembered the scene when Anissina stuffed this convenient ma-powered tool at her. That petite yet arrogant Poison Lady had said,

“This is an invention for girls with naturally slender arms and weak men, but for a young miss soldier like you who might need to move heavy things on your hand sometimes, you may need to use this ‘Ahh Even The Bear’s Paw Wants to Borrow’ too.”

“Hohoho, what young miss soldier! Who is she talking about—Who!”

Wolfram’s body is being lifted up and up, with his back pressed against the wall. To use the terms of the national techniques from the place His Majesty Yuuri grew up, it’s a perfect nodowa^[2].



“Haa--!”

“You’re raising me too high up, Gisela! Let go, hurry up and let go of me!”

If this goes on like this, Wolfram might very likely suffocate.

But Wolfram, on the brink of losing his rational mind, is putting up quite the fight, grabbing Gisela’s wrist and glove, and twisting it unhesitatingly.

“Mgh!”

Gisela clenches her teeth instead of screaming, then turns her body to try and shake off the pressure on her wrist. Although she manages to save her wrist, she also gives Wolfram back his freedom, and his feet finally return to the ground. With that, the Bear Paw has lost its usefulness.

“Did I just witness the moment Anissina’s ma-powered device was defeated with my own eyes?”

Günter murmurs to himself as he stands on the spot motionlessly, feeling as though he’s witnessing an important event for the century as he watches his adopted daughter struggle with Wolfram. Finally he regains his senses when he hears someone’s angry scolding, and realizes he can’t let them keep fighting.

“You’re still in the mood for a breather in the corner!”

“Huh?”

That stern voice is coming from around his knees.

“You coward! If you don’t stop that guy now, not only will the Box open, the soushu will also be released! Is that okay with you?”

That tone is really arrogant, and the voice sounds very unfamiliar. Even if he raises his head and looks around, he can’t see anyone.

“Don’t just stand there! Take me, take this moist pouch and hang it back around that guy’s neck!”

“Me? The pouch?”

Just then, Günter notices something terrifying. That exceptionally arrogant and commanding voice is coming from the amulet he made from his own hair.

“D-don’t tell me there’s a life living inside my ‘Günter’s Protection’...”

“You’re still thinking about that stupid question? Look at that guy, hang the pouch back onto his neck!”

Wolfram has pushed Gisela to a side and reaches out his hands, about to touch that Box. There’s no time to hesitate! So Günter grabs the one hundred percent hair pouch and dashes up to him.

Then with a momentum that almost makes a smacking sound, he hangs the amulet's string back around Wolfram's neck.

His brow immediately creases tightly, his lips contort, his expression turns to one of grief, and he even poses as though screaming.

"...Phew."

But neither Günter nor Gisela hear Wolfram's scream. The situation also takes a completely different turn from what they expected, moving towards the unexpected.

The amulet, standing between the Box and Wolfram's body, bounces Wolfram away with an immense power. Although he crashes to the ground, fortunately this takes him away from the Forbidden Box. Now, no matter how far he stretches his arm, he wouldn't be able to reach the Box.

And then they witness something even more unbelievable.

Golden hair starts sprouting out of the palm-sized pouch.

This really ominous-looking pouch is made of one hundred percent pure hair, and since the knitting isn't that good, there are many places where the hair seems rather loose. But the main component is Günter's grey hair, so not one spot is golden.

In that case, why is the pouch sprouting golden hair?

"Why is this happening..."

Putting aside Günter, whose normal reactions are exaggerated as it is, the image before their eyes make even brave Gisela hold her breath—although she's still wearing the bristly fur glove.

It's not just golden hair emerging from the pouch around Wolfram's neck, but a human head. No, it hasn't emerged yet. Following the top of the head is a forehead, and the back of the head where the hair is a little messy, and then the face. If the brows appear as well, so they should be able to see eyes and ears.

But all of this is unexpected.

What come next are fingers. The fingertips grab the side of the pouch, pulling the pouch open in one go.

The opening to the pouch has already reached its limit, and miraculously it doesn't break. The opening is still expanding at the same time, and a man's arm reaches out of the pouch that has gone beyond its limit, plus an forearm and shoulder—that's a right arm with well trained muscles.

The two grown men scream, and the lady known as the Demon Sergeant goes pale.

She doesn't yell nor do her knees grow weak even in a situation like this, so it goes to show that Gisela is still the braver one. As for Wolfram, he can't even speak anymore, frothing at the mouth and about to pass out any time.

No wonder, too, after all a human head and arm just came out of the pouch he always wore around his neck.

Goodness--! The pouch—There's a person coming out of the pouch--!!"

"Calm down! Please calm down, Father^[3]! It's not that rare for a person to come out of the pouch. Not long ago, Miss Greta ran out of His Excellency Gwendal's pouch too, right!"

That and this are completely different things.

"Y-you're right, Gisela. This is very normal in majutsu as well, it's a normal trick. There must be a secret mechanism somewhere, there must be!"

But the pouch man doesn't care about the three of them, lost in waving and stretching his arm. His forehead and one arm are both stuck in the middle, which makes him look even more disgusting and terrifying.

Just as Gisela was about to yell, 'Damned Poison Lady, is this one of your doings again!?'".

Suddenly there's a deep 'crack!', and the pouch man's head knocks into Wolfram's chin before weaseling out of the pouch.

That person has shiny golden hair and brilliant blue eyes.

It feels as though they saw him before... But last time they met, he wasn't quite so three-dimensional, and more flat.

Maybe he's decided that he can't pull much more of himself out, so the pouch man raises his right hand and casually greets them,

“Hey!”

1. [↑](#) I... I really don't know if it's a typo or intentional, but my raws use the word for 'grow' as in, 'expand' or 'swell up'...
2. [↑](#) A sumo move where you press your hand against your opponent's throat.
3. [↑](#) If it's okay, I'll just use Father where she uses 'Adopted Father', with a '-sama' too. It just sounds weird to yell 'Lord Adopted Father!'

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

I've known for a long time that mazoku aren't very, or rather at all, welcome on human land.

Add that to the fact that I'm the type to run around, and that just means I experienced this myself long ago. Still, even if I know it's because of history and past conflicts, it's still not too nice when I'm rejected to my face.

And it's not just my feelings that are greatly hurt, depending on the situation even my life could be in danger.

Especially a Japanese person like me with black hair and eyes. In this world they're called soukokus, and even treated as a bad omen...

"Waa, this is bad!"

"What? What happened, Shibuya?"

I yank Murata's hair, stuffing him underneath Gwendal's shirt that is sticking out, while I hide my head behind the eldest son as well. Although his shirt is dripping wet and sticks to my head, there's nothing I can do about it. I couldn't tell normally because he dresses so neatly, but it turns out Lord von Voltaire's shirt really is very long.

In the past I only had stones thrown at me in the country I went to, but in a land we don't deal much with there may be false information spreading, I even heard of rumors where double blacks were thought to be rare ingredients for immortality and eaten.

If it was just me, I might still try to bluff my way through by saying 'you'll get a stomachache if you eat me', but together with Murata, who looks like his brains and background are both pretty decent, I wouldn't be surprised if someone shows up saying, 'At the very least let me have a finger.'

And they could come up with a lot more excuses too, such as they need to qualify for a license or to get into their dream school.

“We need to hide our hair and eyes, or else we’d be gobbled up!”

“Why would we be gobbled up?”

As expected, Murata is completely shocked.

“Although it depends on where we are, it seems as though there’s a strange rumor that anyone who eats the meat of double blacks like us would become immortal.”

“Huh? Even if the original really is immortal, eating your meat won’t have the same effect, y’know. Who’s spreading that sort of urban legend?”

“When you were in this world, weren’t there legends like that?”

“Of course there weren’t such lame legends.”

“Hey!”

The owner of our hiding place, Gwendal warns,

“Don’t talk beside my stomach.”

“Ah! Sorry, Gwen.”

“This pose is strange enough as it is, if you guys squirm around inside my clothes, I won’t stand for it.”

We get up among the fish scales and slime, trying to figure out a way out of here. Although one of us obviously looks humanoid, the two shorter one are both hiding on the left and right side of his shirt, so we’re walking in a way where the top half looks human, but from the stomach and below we look like a spider.

A spider has eight legs, while we have six. It looks just like that sci-fi movie my dad likes, what was it called? “Ball X from the Shortstop” [\[1\]](#)?

But to Lord von Voltaire, we don’t look like a spider or an octopus like this.

“This is practically like ‘Chicks Hide-and-Seek’.”

To think that instead of ‘Don’t cover your head and leave your bottom exposed’, the strong soldier is more used to saying ‘Chicks Hide-and-Seek’, that’s just too cute... No, I meant, too exasperating. And the latter isn’t a normal thing to say, either. The fact that Gwen purposely said it shows just how much he loves little chicks.

“But the atmosphere here sure is heavy—To me the fishing haul is a rare harvest, but the locals don’t seem to think so—”

Murata lifts up the shirt hem as though pulling apart curtains, and pushes the middle of his glasses up with his finger at the same time. I can’t believe that his glasses didn’t fall off even when we were in the ocean, which goes to show it really is part of his face.

But it is true that our surroundings are abnormally quiet. There are obviously boats entering the harbor one by one, and there are voices as well, but I can’t feel the liveliness, chaos and noisiness of a busy fishing port at all.

Besides, despite the fact that such strange creatures have showed up at the fishing port, no one is pointing at us and laughing or freaking out. No, even the fishermen from before who hauled us up were just staring and muttering, but they didn’t scold or curse us, why on earth is that?

Although I don’t want to be scolded, at the very least we should become the hot topic of conversation.

“Mmrgh, don’t tell me they’re giving us the silent eyeball treatment? Although we’re not being hated, it feels pretty embarrassing to not be laughed at either.”

“It’s precisely because they caught people, that’s why none of the fisherman are happy with their haul, right? After all, people aren’t maidmer princesses.”

Gwendal’s words make me ask in terror,

“I-if they caught a maidmer princess, would they eat it?”

“No, they wouldn’t treat it as food. But if they released it into the ocean, there would be good weather the next day, so in a way there are some benefits.”

“Ah, I see, thank goodness.”

So Conrad’s ex girlfriend won’t be doomed.

“Generally this world doesn’t eat humanoid creatures, so you don’t have to be so scared.”

“No, it’s not like I’m scared, I just want to avoid the danger.”

“Is that so?”

Perhaps he's surprised by my self-awareness and growth, because that hypnotic deep voice only slightly rises in tone. And then he continues as though explaining,

"Only kotsuchizoku would... to each other's bones... Forget it, that's just a legend among legends."

"That's right, they would suck each other. It's a sign of affection."

Murata says something scary.

"Sucking bones!?"

"Yup, just like a child with candy, it's very interesting."

Could you really call an action such sucking bones 'affection'? Murata's knowledge sends a chill down my back sometimes.

No matter how far we walk in this unnatural pose, the color of the stone slab ground doesn't change, and the smell of seawater doesn't go away either. It seems some water even got into my ears, so I hear the splashing of sea waves. Rather than waves, it's more like the sound of waves beating against boats, or the sound of wood rubbing against wood by the creaky oars.

I find it strange, so I peel apart the military clothes and find that although we're walking in the street, there are some small boats that look like gondolas in the canal in the middle, letting passengers off at their destinations.

"I didn't expect this to be a city so filled with the smell of seawater."

"How unexpected, this place is just like that place."

Murata is just like a guest who walked into a bar, pulling up the shirt hem with practiced movements and sighing,

"The port city on the water, Venezia.

"You mean, Venice?"

"That's not wrong either. I bet this canal forks just like a road, and people here use gondolas in place of public transport. Waa~~ nostalgic Venezia."

"You've been there?"

"A previous owner of my soul stayed there once. Back then it wasn't known as

Italy, but the Republic of Venice.”

“That long ago! And there’s such an upper-class feeling.”

We have Gwendal’s waist between us, so I can’t see Murata’s expression. I wonder, what expression is he using when he talks about this homesickness?

“Back then I operated a bakery, and lived a happy life.”

“Mn.”

I answered simply and nodded. Hearing him say that he was happy makes me feel very glad. Still, hearing that it was a life I’m unfamiliar with fills me with a little regret.

“Hey, something seems to be moving inside your clothes.”

I don’t get to immerse in that ill-timed melancholy for long, as soon Gwendal reaches out his hand to pat my chest. That position is just underneath my collarbone, which rises and falls in time, busily.

“Eh? It’s a fish.”

I actually hadn’t noticed there was a fish in my shirt, that just goes to show how slow I am.

“It’s a sardine, huh—”

Murata pokes his head out from behind Gwen’s waist, his expression carefree as he says. He has such a good understand of our friends in the sea too.

So it’s a sardine~~ Sardine fishballs are very popular in Kanto. But it seems rather inconvenient to put it in my shirt or pants pocket, since I can’t use it to wipe sweat or blow my nose.

“A small fish is fine, but you have to be aware of what’s in your shirt pocket. After all, sometimes some really crazy things get in there.”

Maybe he has some experience in that field, because his advice sounds especially real.

Gwen likes small and cute things, so he must have hidden something like hamsters. Although they look fluffy in pictures, but I really don’t want any small animals in my pockets.

When I was in second grade, I once carried an American lobster in my pocket and sauntered on the street, but in the end I was attacked by scissors through the cloth, and it was—that softer part of my skin that was attacked.

Not only didn't it become a bittersweet summer memory, it instead became a painful and bloody memory.

“What do you do when you find a sardine by the roadside...”

Actually if I put it down by my feet, it should be able to jump into the water on its own, right? The surface of the ground is very wet and slippery, and there are a lot of puddles preventing my shoes from drying as well. But the sun is very strong now, and the breeze is cool too, so it seems the rainy season is over.

“Hey!”

Just then Gwen forcefully pulls me back from the right side,

“You'll fall if you walk too close to that side.”

“Eh? Aah.”

Another half step towards the side is the canal, and the water level is pretty high as well. Maybe it rained continuously until this morning. I decided I might as well walk closer and then release the fish into the water, so I hold the bouncing fish with my right hand lightly and face the canal.

Just as I relax my fingers, and get ready to let go.

“Ow!”

A boy running straight at me knocks into my right side forcefully, snatching away the sardine I was about to release. Thankfully Gwen immediately supports me before I fall, but since I lost my balance, I appear from underneath his shirt.

That boy leaves quickly, so all I could see was the back of his curly-haired head, of a color between green and brown. Although I can't tell his age and whether or not he should be in elementary school by his height, but he sure is fast.

“Hey, you don't have to run!”

I planned on releasing that fish long ago anyway, but as I yell at that the back of that disappearing head, it seems that the other person doesn't hear me.

“Forget it, Shibuya, he hasn’t heard you. He must really want sardine.”

“But I have to explain it to him clearly. Hey—Buddy! You don’t have to run, you’re not a thief, geez!”

Judging by that lightning fast speed, I won’t be able to catch up to him no matter how fast I run. In that case, at the very least I must make sure he hears my words. So I put my fishy-smelling hands to my mouth and yell, but Gwen grabs my wrist, as though reprimanding me.

“That was a fish I planned to release, I have to tell him what he did doesn’t amount to stealing. Otherwise that child will think of himself as a thief, and live the rest of his life in fear, right!?”

“But he probably can’t hear you anymore.”

Exactly, that boy’s figure has long disappeared among the buildings, so he won’t hear me no matter how I yell.

What a shame, if that child hadn’t heard my voice, he may always think of himself as a criminal.

“I was already releasing it into the ocean.”

“That child was strange as well, the truth is he just has to go to the jetty, then wouldn’t he have as many sardines as he could want?”

It’s just that for some reason Gwendal ignores Murata and his confusion, instead pulling up his shirt and revealing his stomach—what signal is that? Is he warning us to be careful when sleeping?

It’s only when someone pokes my head that I remember, the whole reason I was hiding under Gwendal’s clothes was to cover my black hair.

“Is it really okay?”

“...Forget it.”

I put my hand on the large, friendly and mature hand of his, pulling his half-dry shirt back to its original place,

“Forget it, there’s no more need to hide under your clothes, it’s not like we’ll be eaten anyway. And there’s no need to hide the fact that we’re mazoku, even

if others will say we're unlucky or throw rocks at us, that's nothing much.

Hearing my words Murata pokes out his face as well, though his hair, as black as mine, is poking out in all sorts of strange directions.

"Besides, anyone could tell that Gwendal is a mazoku just by looking, right? Not only does he look like a mazoku among mazoku, he even has a more maou-like aura than me. That's why, once they know you're a mazoku, they should also know that the two of us, just like live sharksuckers, are birds of a feather."

"Shibuya, there's no need to make yourself sound like such a villain, is there?"

I don't know where the problem is, in the sharksucker or the birds, but such a trivial misunderstanding immediately becomes meaningless.

Because a more serious matter descends on us, and it has nothing to do with sharksuckers or birds.

"It's that guy!"

I turn around hastily when I hear someone yell, only to see two men pointing at me. Thinking "there's already someone here to interrogate the double black?", I instinctively put my hands on my head, but the situation doesn't seem to be what I expected. Furious, the two of them jog over to us,

"It's this guy! This is the guy who was saying so much to that brat!"

I was just feeling relieved that there was only two of them, when suddenly more reinforcements appeared. There are men coming non-stop from behind buildings, the corners of streets, and soon there are enough to surround us, easily more than ten of them. Although they're not as buff as Adalbert or Gurrier, they all have pretty decent bodies.

All of them have copper skin from days under the sun on the beach, so they should be ship workers. I look around, and notice that there are two women among them. Their bodies are also very sturdy, just like fishermen's wives.

Wordlessly Lord von Voltaire takes one step forward. Although I can't see it, I bet the crease between his eyebrows has gotten even deeper.

"Wait a sec, do you want something with me?"

"Please stop pretending, sir!"

“Sir, you are obviously the partner of a thief!”

“Hey!”

The words they use to scold us are so polite it's eerie, but their attitude is very fierce. As soon as Gwendal speaks, though, his absolute aura of authority turns out to be very effective even now.

“Show some respect with your words!”

The men instantly fall silent, and glare at my face to show the fury in their hearts, which is sort of a way to fight without meeting Gwendal's gaze. But those ladies can't keep their temper down at all, and it seems even that deep voice that vibrates all the way into your bones aren't enough to sate their anger.

“How could as you ask for respect, sir?”

“Sir, what did you say to that child!?”

More than twenty gazes train on my body at once. There are blue ones, brown ones, grey ones with hints of green, all sorts of eyes are looking at me.

“What do you mean, ‘what did I say’...”

“You obvious gave him some kind of orders, sir!”

“Exactly, it was obviously you, sir, who ordered him to steal our stones!”

Although the bizarrely polite speech is making me dizzy, the furious situation in front of me is still nothing to be trifled with.

Overwhelmed by their intensity, I ask them back,

“What stones?”

I didn't ask the child to steal anything for me, forget stones, not even a cow and chopsticks. Even if we had to retrieve a flyaway ball from a stubborn old man's house, I would be the one doing it. I thought that as long as I talked reason, I'd find that the other party tends to be very nice.

But the law of talking reason and discovering the other side's nice side doesn't seem to work now. Those ladies' murderous expressions are just too hard to approach.

“It's stones, the sea grapes^[2]! We can't build boats without that, but you, sir,

used a child to steal something so important, and even thought you could get away with it by acting dumb, how shocking!”

What sea grapes? Stop joking, why would a Saitama person like me have an Okinawan specialty?

But Murata keeps repeating that phrase and raises his eyebrows behind his glasses, his expression saying, “Ah~~ now I remember” as he says something to Gwendal.

As for me, I’m desperately trying to deal with the angry missus (and the nodding fishermen), so I don’t have the luxury of listening to his reminisces.

“I didn’t do anything.”

“‘Black-haired’ are just like that!”

The missus scolds me without waiting for me to finish my sentence. One of them leans forwards with her hands on her hips, and the other bends backwards with her arms crossed in front of her chest, her expression that of extreme rage,

“We can’t stand ‘black-haired’ anymore!”

“It’s always like this, always saying you didn’t do anything. Every time you open your mouths it’s ‘we didn’t do anything before that day’, always ‘before that day before that day’. Then why don’t you tell us how we should keep on living before this country sinks?”

“Wait a sec, what are the ‘black-haired’ you’re... Waa!”

The two women grab my collar without answering my question, and Gwendal hurriedly reaches out to stop them, but he’s no match for those missuses who are used to dealing with their husbands and sons.

Their movements are lightning fast, just like Mom when she’s getting her allowance out of Dad’s suit, patting down my whole body and even reaching their hands into my pocket to grope around.

Right now I have no time to get all flushed over the fact that ‘I’m being molested all over by married women’, because soon enough they bring out a stone the size of a pickled plum from the pocket near my butt, their expressions full of triumph. But even that is only for a second, because they immediately look

furious again.

“Everyone, look!”

“Eh, so that’s a sea grape?”

It’s not just the size, it even looks exactly like a pickled plum. It’s hard since it’s a stone, but at the very least its outward appearance, its color and wrinkles are just like the high quality pickled plum made from Kishuu-nankou-ume^[3], completely different from the oceanic pearls from Okinawa.

Why the heck would I steal a stone like this when I don’t even know how to use it!

“You’ve understand, ladies, it wasn’t me! There’s no point at all in me taking something like this... Could it be, that child just now!?”

“So you, sir, were the one who ordered that child to steal the sea grape!”

Crap, so it wasn’t that he wanted sardines, but instead he wanted someone to hide the stolen stone on? He pretended to knock into me and then put it into my pocket, no wonder he ran so fast after that. The truth is he wanted to get away from these two furious missuses.

“So what he wanted wasn’t sardines, but a scapegoat...”

Murata murmurs helplessly.

“That brat must have been hired by those guys, that must be it!”

“These adults are the real masterminds!”

The men who let their wives take charge of catching the thieves start yelling as well.

Doesn’t that mean the one treated as a criminal now isn’t that boy, but me!?

And then some busybody, I don’t know who, tattled to the police, and four men in soldier uniforms run towards us, all armed with swords on their belts too.

This time even Gwendal has lost all his patience, pulling me out from the fishermen surrounding me and pushing me towards Murata,

“Go now.”

“Gwen!

“Cut the crap and run.”

He pushes aside the cowering fishermen with moves of a trained soldier, and the soldiers of this country arrive at the same time, quickly drawing their swords in unison.

“You guys go ahead, I will definitely catch up.”

He swings a punch at the stomach of someone near him, and then spins around to knock the other person’s chin with his arm. The next moment, his fingers, calloused after so many years of holding the sword, have already taken the weapon from the falling soldier’s hands.

I lean out to try and stop him, but my hands don’t reach,

“Wait! Wait a sec, Gwen! Stop, I won’t run!”

“What are you saying!?”

He glares at me with a look that says, ‘Have you gone mad?’

“I won’t run.”

Behind me, Murata sighs,

“Are you for real!? What happens now if you’re arrested in another country under some unknown charges? At the very least know your own position, to the mazoku, you are...”

I immediately know what is at the end of that unfinished sentence.

I am the king of the mazoku, and their symbol.

“I know, and it’s because I know that I said that. That’s precisely why I can’t run. If I run, won’t that be admitting that I’m guilty?”

Lord von Voltaire, who looks like a rational kind of thinker, is already unable to protest.

“If I run just like that, then I will forever be treated as a criminal in this country —Because I didn’t steal the stone, and because I didn’t commit the crime that would make me a thief, I cannot run.”

Sorry, Gwen. I apologize to him wordlessly in my heart. Sorry you went to all that trouble for nothing, but I can't stand being misunderstood.

"I know my position, but if I'm treated as a criminal, what do you think would happen to our comrades who come to this land in the future?"

If I don't clear my name, won't the mazoku be treated as people who don't mind even after they commit a crime?

Murata breathes softly, interrupting me over my shoulder,

"It's not suitable, faced with this situation now, to think of something so far ahead."

I don't know if he's talking to me, or to Gwen.

"I think our brothers who come here in the future would also think that the number one priority right now is your safety. We'll have other ways to clear your name later, so it's not a bad idea to leave first temporarily and figure out a proper plan of action."

I shake my head slowly, saying,

"I won't run."

If it were Conrad, by now he would surely be saying with a smile, "I knew it would end up like this." If it were Wolfram, his pretty face would surely go completely red with anger, and then he'd say, "That's why you're such a henachoko."

Lord von Voltaire isn't like either of them.

He stops his defending and attacks, releasing the sword he'd just taken. The metal falls onto the damp stone floor, making a deep and hard sound.

And then he lowers both hands to show that he has given up fighting back, closing his eyes at the same time,

"Is that so?"

That's all he said.

1. [↑](#) Yuuri incorrectly says: “遊撃からの送球 X” , “Ball X from the shortstop”. The movie is called in Japanese “ 遊星からの物体X” -> Object X from the Stars; in English it’s John Carpenter’s “THE THING”. Yuuri only has baseball in his head, this is why he mixes up the words.
2. [↑](#) A type of edible seaweed(?), also known as sea caviar.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caulerpa_lentillifera)
3. [↑](#) Kishuu-nankou-ume 紀州南高梅. A type of plum, nankou-ume from Kishuu. <http://marushin.ok.shopserve.jp/pic-labo/tokujubai-up.jpg>

Chapter 4

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On the boat that's rocking along on the canal waters, Murata speaks up,
"I remember there's also a saying that 'the first to run is the first to win' —"
His tone isn't stern, and there's even a hint of a smile on his lips.

"Didn't I say it before? Why must we run? Doesn't running prove we're guilty? I obviously didn't steal anything, I was framed. Why on earth would a victim have to run?"

We're riding on a small boat that can move smoothly even in a narrow canal, known as gondolas in Venice. But the guests sitting on the boat aren't here to sightsee, and neither is there robust singing coming from the stern.

Even if it's not wide enough for them to send extra guards, there are still soldiers in full arms in front and behind us, keeping watch. Add that to the fact that Lord von Voltaire demonstrated a bit of his skill, and the local soldiers are even warier of us.

Since we've already decided to protest our innocence with the local authorities, we have no intention of escaping, hiding or resisting, but we can't gain their trust with words alone.

Although this is a canal for gondolas, it's a water transport route that draws water from the sea. Logically speaking, there should be sea creatures swimming around in the water, and as though reading my mind, a few of them jump out of the water on cue, splashing water everywhere.

I wonder what happened to that sardine boy.

Although we always hear about shepherd boys, it's still rare to hear about sardine boys after all. Besides, I don't think he's old enough to be called that yet^[1]. After all, all I saw was the back of his curly golden-brown hair, so even if I have the chance to see him again, I'm not confident I could recognize him.

“If I have the chance to see him again... it’s probably impossible, huh?”

I can’t help but say self-deprecatingly at my own naïve thoughts.

I actually imagined that the boy might show up at the police station or court one day, and prove our innocence.

“What’s the matter?”

Gwendal asks, from where he’s sitting in front of me and leaning against the side of the boat.

“Nothing.”

His hands are tied behind his back, and he almost can’t move his upper body freely at all. As for the harmless Murata and I, all we have are our hands tied in front of us. They think Lord von Voltaire might be a little impressive, so they restrict his freedom severely.

The truth is he’s not just a little bit impressive, he’s so impressive that even if you people sent fifty men to attack him, they still wouldn’t be his match. Seeing him tied up all obediently like that, makes me feel really sorry for him.

He probably feels really discontent with it.

“Speaking of which... Gwen, don’t you feel uncomfortable?”

“Why would you ask that?”

“I mean, don’t you guys get dizzy on human land because of houryoku?”

His hair is plastered onto his drying face and forehead, so I push it away with my index finger in case it tickles him. It’s also my fault that he can’t even push away his own hair now.

“Weren’t you uncomfortable last time as well? When we went to Sverera to find the Demon Flute.”

“Ahh.”

That’s right, that time we were also handcuffed and thrown into a detention center, and he sure suffered a lot as he was spun around in circles. I’m not sure if it’s because we just happened to think of the same thing, but we instantly fall silent. Looks like whenever he goes on a trip with me, nothing good ever comes

to Lord von Voltaire.

“Wolf’s condition is more obvious. Because his face would immediately turn white, but your resistance is stronger.”

“I don’t feel any particular change, maybe because this land has weaker houryoku.”

“That’s good to know.”

Maybe it’s because my body is MADE IN JAPAN, but I rarely feel dizzy even on human land. Even if I stumble a bit, I recover quickly too, and then I can live normally like a regular person. This must be because I adapt very well, huh. No matter what kind of soil I’m on, I never lose my appetite, and I can sleep fine even after changing pillows, though maybe it’s because I’m denser than others.

“But thank goodness, Gwen didn’t use his sword. If he were to really fight with the soldiers back then, we definitely won’t be treated as mere thieves.”

“Even if he wanted to use it, he doesn’t have a sword.”

Murata finally talks again after quite a while of silence. As expected of the brainy type, he notices even such tiny details.

“Eh, is that so? Now that you mention it, I just remembered that just now while we were hiding under the shirt, there was nothing stuck at his waist.”

“Which idiot in the world would bring a sword while diving into the sea to save a drowning person.”

“You’re right, that would make him more likely to sink.”

Speaking of sinking, those missuses did say some things I couldn’t help but notice. I think they said ‘how should we continue living before this country sinks?’

Don’t tell me this country is in a recession? That’s why a boy not even ten years old has to resort to stealing pickled plum stones.

“But Lord von Voltaire sure gave me a shock, pushing Shibuya to me like that. You wanted me to protect Shibuya, was it? It’s the first time in my life someone asked me to protect another.”

“Eh!?”

I really can't pretend I didn't hear that.

This may even be the first time Murata and Gwen talked to each other normally. In order to let them understand each other better, to be honest I shouldn't interrupt. But even though I know I shouldn't, I subconsciously interrupt anyway,

“You said ‘protect’... Was that what the movement meant? No way, it should mean, ‘go, run’, right?”

“Eh—Shibuya, back then that is what Lord von Voltaire's gaze meant—”

“Wait a sec, does Murata look stronger than me? Gwendal, tell me honestly, do I look that useless to you?”

“It's not that either.”

“I'm so happy—It feels like I finally passed my Bruce Lee-Level One Certification. I just leveled up recently, y'know!”

“What--!?”

Seeing the eyes behind those lenses narrow in delight, I feel a little upset. To think I look even more useless than my brainiac friend, then doesn't that mean there's no point in me choosing to learn judo at all?

By the way, the reason I didn't choose to learn kendo is because whenever I hold a stick in my hands I'll swing it like a baseball bat; and the reason why I didn't choose tennis is because whenever I see a ball, I have the urge to hit it to the moon.

Those are all basic human instincts, so I can't control them. After all, everyone wants to be a hard hitter at least once.

“That's why I said it's not like that.”

“...Too late, I'll try my best to train up my muscles more.”

“But thanks to that, I really understand Lord von Voltaire's thoughts now.”

The person who just passed the Bruce Lee Level One Certification pushes his glasses up with his tied-up hands, closing one eye as he says,

“For example what his priorities are.”

“You don’t have to confirm stuff like that at a time like this, right? Gwen’s number one priority has always been Shin Makoku, he would jump into burning hell for the mazoku. He’s a lot more reliable than I am, isn’t that right?”

Gwendal doesn’t reply, just staring off into the distance.

Soon, we see many buildings of different sizes ahead of the intricately criss-crossing water routes. Compared to walking on the stone roads, it is indeed much faster to use the water routes with gondolas.

“Speaking of which—” I say with a sigh,

“Just how far have we been thrown off? Come to think of it, we don’t even know the name of this country.”

If I asked the soldier sitting in front, there’s a chance he wouldn’t even answer me. But in a manner of speaking we’re the victims here, so I don’t want to have to ask the guys who tied us up either.

“Could we make a deduction from the time difference?”

“That’s related to the size of the stars as well, it’s impossible to tell if time is going fast or slow, so we still can’t deduce anything.”

Murata says that, and then continues,

“But could this be the country called ‘Darco’?”

“Eh, you know where we are?”

The intellectual nods hard,

“Since the version of the map in my brain is really old, I wouldn’t have a clue without knowing what ocean we’re at. It was the name of that ‘Sea Grape’ stone that made me remember.”

“Is that so? I always thought that was a tasty dish.”

“Darco, huh—”

Even Gwendal can’t help but mutter to himself,

“Why did we end up so far away, of all places.”

“Eh? Is it really far? Speaking of which, you should have a world map in your head, right? Where is Darco? Approximately? Which is closer, Shimaron or Seisakoku?”

“...Neither is close, Darco is opposite to Shin Makoku.”

I can't help but ask my friend,

“Uh—When you say opposite direction, if say we're in Japan, where would that be?”

“Brazil, I guess?”

“Brazil! The one with the Rio Carnival, that Brazil!?”

That really is very far, nothing like the distance between the Sapporo Dome and the Fukuoka Dome, huh.

Lord von Voltaire stays silent for quite a few seconds, and I get a bad feeling.

“Darco has no diplomatic ties with us.”

“How could that be? Gwen, aren't there too many countries we don't have diplomatic ties with?”

“You're probably right.”

This makes me, the rookie Maou, ashamed to meet people.

The gondola shakes violently, and the three of us sway accordingly. By the way, the sun that had been hanging high in the sky set at some point, and the afternoon sky is starting to approach evening.

“But Shibuya shouldn't reprimand him either, right? You weren't king for that long, were you? That's why he... Lord von Voltaire also only recently came into power.”

“You. Are. Exactly. Right.”

“Okay, okay, just work on it next time, work on it next time.”

Of course I know that, and I had no intention of scolding Gwen.

After all, I don't have any knowledge or tricks up my sleeve, so compared to me, he's a few times, no, maybe even a few hundred times better. No, I think

just comparing myself with him is an insult to him.

Me, whenever I get scolded I'll just rely on Lord von Voltaire's abilities, throwing all the administrative duties to him, so I have no right to complain.

But what I'm more concerned about is how Murata is suddenly saying such things to suck up to Gwen. Could it be that he was that happy to receive the Bruce Lee-Level One Certification? But that sound like a shady correspondence course.

Forget it, as the saying goes, 'it's a good thing to improve relationships'.

I convince myself with those words, and then start collecting the intel I need right now.

"Then what kind of a country is Darco? We can understand the language here, and everyone speaks really politely, so I'm kinda surprised."

"It's that thing, the thing called geographical differences. For example on Earth, if an American heard a British person speaking English, they would think that person is pretentious as well, right?"

Their politeness is so weird I suspect 'is it really just that degree of difference?', but my friend's theory does have a certain persuasiveness as well.

"But geographically speaking, rather than Britain, it's more like Venice, right? It's just, how is the political situation on the city on the water like? You know, whether they often have restriction orders or warnings about leaving the country."

The truth is we were hauled onto shore by a fishing boat, and even caught by the army who are equal to police, so I think there's no way for us to gather any intel now.

"Even I don't know what kind of a country it is now."

"What did you say? Don't you know the name and culture of this place?"

"I can't help it, my soul was on Earth for more than 3000 years. So all I know are things from before that. As for the way the world is now, you should know better than I do. Wait, but it changed drastically because of you as well, right? Changed for the better, I mean."

“Yes...”

Even I don't know if I should say, 'No, what are you talking about' to refuse it, or scratch my head and say, 'Is that so~~' After all, my hands are tied up and can't move. But from what I can see, I see Gwendal's expression with the corners of his lips lifted slightly, throwing my mind into a blank.

He's laughing at me, right?

I can't figure out any other reason for his reaction, so I immediately change the subject, hoping to hide this awkwardness,

“B-but you're really impressive too, staying there for 3000 years? Then you should know who founded the Kamakura shogunate^[2], right?”

“It's Minamoto no Yoritomo.”

“Waa—Not Ashikaga Takauji^[3]?”

“It was written in the Japanese history textbook. I say, Shibuya, I'm telling you this now, because it'd be very troubling if others misunderstood me. Even if I have memories of the past, I can't possibly know who killed Kennedy. Because I wasn't in America back then.”

Although he's not replying in tandem, Lord von Voltaire sure is listening with interest.

On the other hand, the soldiers watching us aren't listening to our conversation at all. Maybe they realized that we have no intention of running, so they're busy doing their own thing, be it pulling out the little thorns on their nails or checking their blades for nicks.

To them, it's no longer important what we prisoners are saying.

Thanks to these soldiers' nonchalance, we're very grateful for the treatment we're getting.

“Listen carefully, all I experienced in the past is other lives. And the only reason those memories have lingered in my brain, is just because they're the things the previous owners of my soul saw or heard before.”

“Of course I know that.”

Something jumps up again beside the boat, and this time I can obviously see it's a fish. That's a little red fish that a child's palm can easily scoop up, its appearance and size similar to goldfish on Earth, only it's a fancier species, more like telescope eye or lionhead rather than wakin^[4].

“Three sirs—”

That intolerably polite speech comes from the stern again.

“We have arrived.”

All we can see at the end of the canal is a sprawling white and blue-gray building. Although I don't know if it's a police station or a courthouse, it feels obviously solemn and dark in this easygoing port city on the water. Putting aside the fact that it is a long rectangular shape with no decorations whatsoever, its extremely few windows also gets on my nerves.

That side of the wall facing the port and the sea is the direction where the sunlight comes in during the daytime, too.

But I immediately know the reason—because that is a place that does not need windows.

1. [↑](#) Basically the word used is ‘shounen’, which is more like ‘young man’, but sardine/shepherd young man just sounds like a mouthful, so I put ‘boy’ instead.
2. [↑ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamakura_shogunate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamakura_shogunate)
3. [↑](#) The founder and first shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashikaga_Takauji)
4. [↑](#) All types of goldfish, wakin being the most common in Japan

Chapter 5

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I use an even cheerier voice to say to Murata, “Speaking of which~”

Faced with something so scary, who knows how terrified he is feeling inside. Even if it doesn’t show in his expression or voice, he must be trembling inside his heart.

Even if he’s a sage with over a hundred different memories, in actuality he’s still a slightly... no, quite intelligent modern high school student, so it wouldn’t be surprising if he panics from fear when he suddenly finds out he’ll be thrown into a place filled with rough and tough bad men.

That’s why I have to figure out how to get him to perk up, even if it means using my family’s embarrassing history to do it.

“When my old man got drunk, he once revealed his own past, saying he was in lockup before.”

“Is that so~~ Lockup is the substitute jail in the police station, doesn’t your dad look really prim and proper? What did he do? Or was he suspected of something?”

“I dunno, he didn’t tell me that part...”

Whenever my old man talks about this after some beers, my mom would smile mysteriously, so I think it must have something to do between them as a couple, though I have yet to find out the true reason to this day. (For details, see ‘My Son is in Ma!Freelance Work!?’)

“It happened in that time when he was working in New York.”

“A lockup in New York, too! How nice—I have never been in there before either.”

“I think normal Japanese high school students wouldn’t have been in there. Although I’m not very clear about it, it seems he was suspected unfairly, that’s why he was sent into the lockup at the New York police station, exactly the type

of room with bars and a brick wall like you always see in foreign series.”

“Is that so~~ What a wonderful experience, I’m so jealous.”

Are you? Are you jealous? I’m glad you want an experience like that.

“Back then Pops was really annoyed, apparently he was even forcefully lifted by a buff leather-wearing New Yorker guy who was messing around with him.”

“Lifted?”

Murata also forcefully pushes up his glasses frames—our hands were just freed as well.

“He wasn’t choked?”

“Hm, I’m not too sure either, it seems he was lifted. The huge guy who at first came over to intimidate ended up saying ‘PLEASE, PLEASE’ all pettily. And then lifted him up. In any case, whenever anything happens, he would tell me, ‘If you did something like shoplifting, you would be caught and thrown into lockup, where you’ll be threatened by buff guys in leather, y’know.’ So I just told him I wouldn’t shoplift.”

“Mn—This is a father’s educational shield, huh. Using his own embarrassing experience, and hoping his son won’t stray off the path.”

Not only does he not think it’s embarrassing that he’s the only one in the Shibuya household to be cared for by the New York Police Department, he even considers it a heroic achievement.

“Anyway, if it’s what my old man said, it should be only 50% believable. But according to what my mom said, it seems that it’s true, he was thrown into lockup in New York.”

But that is still something that happened in the temporary detention room underneath the police station, it’s still nothing like an actual prison. Even if there are leather-clad truckers in lockup, there aren’t demon convicts, demon guards and demon warden, right.

That’s right, we’re not exactly in the corridors of the NYPD now.

In a prison in a country called Darco, all the way opposite of Shin Makoku.

Prison, jail, in this world both words refer to the same place, though in modern Japan it's called 'keimusho'. In other words, us we little sixteen-year-olds boys, have already done something that warrants us to go to jail.

From just now onwards, we try to huddle closer together when walking, our eyes keeping straight as well, because there are many people in prison clothes gathered behind the iron bars on both sides. Men and women are separated in jail, so of course these are all dirty and disgusting men. And these prisoners seem to want something from us as well, because they keep reaching out their hands from the spaces between the bars.



This should be that one—the ritual where prison inmates welcome rookies I always see in those late night movies.

“I saw this scenario before, y’know, what was it called? Uh—the hero was this handsome guy who kept getting threatened by the scary inmates.”

“Are you talking about ‘Prison Break’?”

“Yeah yeah yeah, it should be that one, but the hero there was super handsome, and I’m just a regular commoner, and neither am I wearing a high-quality watch... Waa, don’t touch me!”

“Ah, Shibuya.”

Before Murata even finishes his sentence, Gwendal has already helped me to peel away the hand reaching towards me from behind the bars. It’s just that, he’s obviously just peeling away the hand, so why is there a blunt sound?

“Move closer to the center, don’t let them touch you with their hands.”

“We’ll do that.”

The three of us—Murata, me and Gwendal have no choice but to lean together, walking in a straight line in that order. The one I envy the most is the frowning Gwendal, he just has to glare to scare the inmates out of their wits. If he just barked loudly with that voice, no matter how fierce or evil that person is, they would run to the corners of the prison.

But we... at least me, not only are my offensive skills average, even my defense is average, and my batting average as well as on-base average are also painful to look at, so I have no presence at all to scare those inmates who are experienced in crime.

“How did things end up like this...”

I shake my hand without completing that sentence, my hair – finally dry—falling onto my face.

But things ended up like this precisely because I decided not to run, so I cannot say anything discouraging now. If I regret it, then I’d be letting down Lord von Voltaire and Murata, who I dragged into this, way too much.

Even if the inmates are yanking the rookies being led to the main detention building by their clothes, the soldiers and guards leading the way won’t do anything. To them this is nothing much, we have to protect ourselves.

“Oh, yeah, Shibuya.”

When we finally get past the zombie area, and are getting ready to enter the next area, Murata suddenly says in a nonchalant tone,

“Your father’s heroic antics you were talking about just now, did they happen in the NYPD lockup?”

“Ah? Oh~~ That’s right, why are you mentioning that now?”

“In that case, it means I’m witnessing the important moment when you, the sixteen-year-old son, surpasses his father. Ah~~ Not bad, not bad, what a touching moment.”

But Murata is right, because the heavy door makes a sound behind me and then falls to a shut.

The three soldiers leading us in the front say coldly, without even turning around,

“After this is the real deal.”

In that case, what was all that about those arms reaching out along that path!? Aren’t they inmates held in here as well?

Speaking of which, there’s a reason we ended up in this situation.

It was just one hour ago, when we were planning to find the police in this country. If this country was under military rule and thus had no police, going straight to court would have been good too. In fact, it would make things easier.

Although being tied up isn’t particularly fun, but we can’t help it until we explain everything and get our names cleared. Even if we feel a little annoyed, we still had to resist that little bit of constraint.

When the soldier sitting on the stern of the swaying gondola announced our arrival at the destination, the thing that appeared before us was a large white and grey-blue building as far as the eyes could see. In this laidback port city on the sea, it seems stern and dark. Even if the wall was facing north, there were ridiculously few of those things that look like windows.

What could this building that tries to minimize its number of windows be?

I couldn’t figure it out no matter how hard I thought.

It was only when the soldier who had been always checking his sword for nicks smiled strangely and told us, that we finally knew the truth.”

“This is the country’s pride and joy, ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome^[1], Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’.”

Raising my head to look at the bridge built over three canals and the stoic building on top of that, I couldn’t help but sigh,

“I get it, no wonder there are so few windows... What!?”

Prison!?

“Wait a sec, did you just prison!? Doesn’t prison mean keimusho? We weren’t interrogated neither was there any crime scene investigation, how did we suddenly get sent to prison!?”

Maybe he’s used to hearing the suspects freak out, so the soldier checking the nicks on his blade wasn’t listening to me at all, and even opened the lock on the steel wire nonchalantly. This whole place is surrounded by tall walls and canals, so we couldn’t get to the building without crossing that bridge.

If you want to get into the roofed indoors, you had to cross two more walls of steels wires and a steel fence.

And technically speaking we’re in the center of the fishing port, but I couldn’t see any shops or inns, only the huge building sitting here.

“Please go in.”

“I—was—saying—We want to go to the police or the court! Not the prison!”

“It doesn’t matter how much you yell, Darco only has this place.”

“What did you say—?”

“Please read this book carefully.”

The soldier gives me a guidebook.

This colossal ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’ seems to be wide enough to cross three parallel canals, and its length is four times its width.

Its width is already rather shocking, to think its length is four times that! The way I see it, it’s ‘the eel’s nest’. What on earth do they plan to do with such a huge prison?

“Aah, this country, Darco, is about the size of Amami Oshima^[2]~~”

Sitting on a chair, Murata flipped through the guidebook and speaks with awe.

“You’re talking so carefree again.”

“But it’s really important to understand your current situation, y’know? You have to first figure out where you are, right? Ah, there’s even a plan of the building’s interiors here, only it’s really intriguing~~”

“What’s intriguing?”

Gwendal, who had been silent until now, breaks out of character as he asks Murata,

“Deducing from the size and population of the island, they really don’t need a prison of this scale. I can’t help but wonder what Darco’s crime rate is like.”

As a city on the water about the size as Amami Oshima, I think this huge prison is a bit... too big.

From the way the soldier said ‘Darco only has this place’, even if I deduce that this place acts as a police station and a court, this large a scale is still very abnormal.

“Speaking of which, are you the only muscle fanatic in the Shibuya famiy?”

After waiting for about fifteen minutes in the waiting room, everyone is chased out into something that looks like a gathering room. Other than us, there are two more middle-aged men, one man in his early fifties, and three young men that are barely more than boys.

The fully-armed soldiers chase everyone into the room, and then lock the door we came in through, so now the only escape route is the door heading into the facility. After that, they stand in front of the blackboard directly in front of us, saying, “Please wait a moment, the warden will be here in a moment.” Their tone is strangely respectful too.

Murata seems to have finished reading the ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome(1), Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’ guidebook, folding it in half and stuffing it into his pocket,

“Your brother may be tall, but he doesn’t really care about muscles. Is the only

muscle worshipper the second son?”

“Why are you mentioning this suddenly? And by ‘second son’, do you mean me? Although my old man is crazy about baseball and love cold jokes, he’s not that muscular. As for my mom and brother, they like cute things more than sports clubs. One takes the fantasy route, the other takes the eroge route, so the things they collect are complete opposites. Oh, yeah, is there something wrong with that?”

“Eh, does that mean you’re more like your father? But I really envy the Shibuya family, the husband and wife get along so well. My family, for instance, is a mess, because both my parents are professionals—although I think they’re really impressive. Since they’re experts at computers and law respectively, so when they argue neither will give way. But on principle my mother always wins the argument, so this makes my father always seems like he has no ground to stand on, it really is a little embarrassing to lose so many times, though.”

“You’re talking like that again—but don’t you really like your folks anyway? People always say, even if you date girls completely unlike your mother when you’re younger, the person you eventually bring back home to meet your parents always tend to be a lot like your mom. Speaking of which, why are you talking about family at a place like this...”

“Mn, about that... Look at that person over there.”

Maybe the power on his lenses isn’t right, but Murata squints behind his glasses, pointing at the person walking into the gathering place. It’s a woman, and the type that would roll her eyes at you if you asked for her real age.

Her hair, somewhere between gold and brown, is tied behind her head. On top of what looks like a female soldier’s uniform is something that completely goes against the name ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome(1), Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’, a lacy pink apron...

The sound from my throat is a clash between a sigh and a breath.

“Look, doesn’t she look a little like—”

Gwendal’s gaze follows his finger, and he frowns in suspicion.

“M-mom...”

Impossible!

This is the prison in an alternate world, and in somewhere like this with the lowest of the low, I actually met someone who's the same type as my mom.

She's not alike, no matter what, she's not alike! Definitely not!

Standing in the middle of the room that looks like the cultural center of a large station building, the female warden stands in front of nine suspects.

The lacy apron makes her look slightly younger, but her true age should be above thirty-five, or the early forties. Not alike! I'll say it again, definitely not alike!

Mom's figure is taller than her, and she's better at acting cute. Her curly hair tied behind her head falling onto her slender shoulders, she would lean her body slightly forward and put her left hand on her hips, holding up her right index fingers as though scolding someone when she talks...

Waa~~ What to do, even her actions and aura are exactly the same!

The female warden, unaware of my internal struggles, speaks in the exact same posture as my mom,

"I'm the person in charge here, Ranatan."

R-Ranatan... what a cute name, one that would make someone smile unconsciously. As the saying goes, the person fits the name. It's just like how there are titles and nicknames that fit characters, so now I'm even more sure these names exist.

"N-no, but we don't give ourselves names, it's a present from our parents. A society where names change according to societal position isn't considered normal either... But, the one that shouldn't exist is the mentality of societal positions in the first place... What on earth am I talking about?"

"It's the same name as the Boy Frog's girlfriend^[3]."

"What are you talking about, Murata? Speaking of which, how old are you?"

"I know a man called Mikotan^[4], though."

"Why are you joining in, Gwendal."

But there's still an unexploded bomb ahead of us, because once I hear what Warden Ranatan has to say next, my knees nearly buckle beneath me.

"From today onwards, Ranatan will help you criminals turn over a new leaf, 'kay—[\[5\]](#)"

Turn, over, a, new, leaf, 'kay—

"Since you're here at this 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison', then everyone here is just like Ranatan's son, 'kay—"

"Am..."

Gwendal, who is standing next to me, grabs my arm, since the destructive power is so strong it seems to make me dizzy.

"A-am I the only one who thinks that way of speech doesn't fit? No matter how I try, I still think that sentence ending is super strange~~"

"That's the way moe-style characters speak. As long as you don't bother about the age, it's not that weird actually, I think this is really common in games and anime. If your brother heard it, I bet he would be beside himself with excitement."

The appearance and aura just like my mom, and my brother's favorite moe-style manner of speaking—this really is the worst situation in history.

But even if one of the suspects is suffering, that won't stop Ranatan's speech.

"Although all of you have done bad things, there's still no such thing as a naturally evil child', 'kay—"

Warden Ranatan waves her extended index finger left and right, pulling the corners of her lips down so it looks like she's about to say 'No way!'. Looks like her lecturing standard fits the young man standing right at the front, because the target she's staring at scratches his butt with an apologetic expression.

"That is why~~ From today onwards, come and desperately try to make up for your crimes here at 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison' with Ranatan!"

But even if she's a moe-style character prison warden, some things when said just can't be ignored.

Be it for men or women, there are battles you absolutely can't lose in life.

"Teacher, I have a question!"

I raise my hand forcefully, with a spirit I rarely show even in class. Warden Ranatan's already round brown eyes go even rounder, looking between me and the file in her hand a few times before pointing at me,

"Do speak, Cru-chan."

The sudden '-chan' word nearly makes me trip. Oh, yeah, whenever I'm with Murata, I will instinctively use the alias Crusoe (Colonel). Together we're Crusoe and Robinson, a duo name just below Murakenzu.

Anyway, I can't be defeated just because she added a '-chan'. Even if the enemy is the same type as my mom, I still need to say what I have to say.

"We're innocent!"

That's right, we're innocent.

"We can only be considered suspects at most, not inmates, so why do we have to be taken to jail?"

"What did Cru-chan do, 'kay?"

Hearing Warden Ranatan's question, the official standing at the side instantly replies,

"They fell into the fishing boat's net..."

"Isn't it too much to be put in jail over falling into a fishing net?"

"But afterwards, out of the hatred in their hearts, they stole a precious sea grape."

"I didn't steal it!"

It really pisses me off to be accused of something I didn't do, so my voice goes instinctively louder than usual.

Ranatan turns her round eyes,

"So you think you're innocent, 'kay?"

"Yes, 'kay... Damn, this catchphrase is contagious if you're not careful."

The moe-style catchphrase sure is scary, though not as scary as a notebook that kills you once your name is written in it.

“Cru-chan and Robin-chan are ‘black-haired’, right?”

“That’s right, they’re ‘black-haired’, And they should be big fish in the Order too.”

“What are ‘black-haired’? What order? Also, just wanted to ask, in ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’, which is 1-chome and which is 3-chome?”

Since the strangely polite language is a local characteristic, I don’t have the right to say anything about it, but the Robin-chan she’s talking about should be Murata.

“‘ Black-haired’ means people with black-hair, ‘kay.”

“What!? There are people with black hair in this country!?”

“Of course there are, ‘kay.”

I think she just said ‘of course’.

“There are ‘black-haired’ serving their time here at this ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’, ‘kay—Isn’t Cru-chan part of the Order, then?”

“Cru-chan... Forget it, it’s fine. I don’t know that order, besides, what do you mean by ‘order?”

“It should be that thing in front of the church where the teachers stand—Our school got rid of that thing long ago^[6].”

Murata says something completely unrelated suddenly. Maybe it’s to calm me down, but his tone is exceptionally carefree.

“Eh, you don’t have an altar at your school? Then what if you wanted to do stair-climbing cardio?”

“At this age we should be memorizing dates in history, not doing stair-climbing cardio, ‘kay—”

You’ve been infected, Murata.

“We don’t know what sort of organization this Order you’re speaking of is.”

Lord von Voltaire crosses his arms around his chest, glaring at Warden Ranatan and the official next to her,

“We’re not from that organization, as we just arrived in this country’s fishing port a few hours ago, so how could we belong to that organization? We came to this land for a certain reason, but we’re from Shin Makoku. Our country has no ties with Darco, but as the people of an independent country, I hope you can give us the treatment we deserve.”

“Have you heard of it, ‘kay?”

“‘Shin Makoku’? Ah, I’ve heard of it, yes, it’s an island country on the other side.”

You’re instantly wrong. Although Japan is an island country, Shin Makoku isn’t.

“The people there only wear hats and shoes when they leave the house, and they walk on the streets with a noose tied around their necks. When they meet, they poke each other’s pits with their fingertips.”

“Is that so, ‘kay?”

Wrong again, but what country are they talking about, a country of perverts?

“That’s the culture of the Geksaray area.”

“Eh, there really is such a culture!?”

“Ah—Indeed there is, it’s the culture of a certain area, but according to my memories it was a long, long time ago.”

“Although it’s only in a certain area, this culture exists to this day. And it’s a minority culture that is under protection.”

“Eh? Protecting a naked tie culture!?”

If it was Shouri, he would definitely happily announce that this is a man’s romanticism, but I have no such fetishes, so I really can’t understand what’s so moving about that sort of action. If you want to strip then strip all the way, if you want to wear clothes then wear them neatly. Wait a sec, it shouldn’t be the naked tie, but the naked apron, right?

On the other hand, that knowledge is way too biased, to think they believe that everyone in Shin Makoku only wear ties as they walk naked on the street, isn't that just like how Hollywood misinterprets Japanese culture? Just like how Japanese warriors with hair buns walk proudly in Akihabara looking for pretty girl models, *etc.*

Just as I'm asking 'What on earth did you read to find out about Shin Makoku?', that official smiles intriguingly and holds out a magazine with subpar paper quality.

On the extravagant cover with many primary colors, there's a female character drawn in the American comic style drawing a bow, and the font of the title looks terrifying, as though it's dripping blood.

"The Poison Lady Anissina and Big Friends"

"Wait a sec, the Poison Lady has been adapted into a comic!?"

"The adult content is really impressive, y'know."

The official says proudly. Speaking of which, does that mean that Poison Lady comic is actually a p-porno comic!?

"The scene where the Poison Lady who was supposed to be dead is revived while biting a bone, is truly terrifying enough to make one's knees weak."

Oh~~ So it's horror geared towards older readers.

Gwendal and I can't help a sigh of relief.

"But this sure is troublesome, 'kay—"

Ranatan puts her index finger on her chin, pouting slightly as she frowns,

"Even if you complain here, you can't go out until you prove Cru-chan's innocence, 'kay."

In other words we have to be locked in here with the criminal squad? Stop kidding.

"Throwing us into jail without even a trial, what justice in this!? Isn't this the city on the water? When you talk about the city on the water, don't you mean Venice? When you talk about Venice, you get the Merchant of Venice, and when

you talk about the interesting parts it's... Uh—Um----

“When the COSPLAY judge made a mind-blowing judgment.”

“Yeah, that's the one. Isn't the best part of the Merchant of Venice the COSPLAY judge?”

Even I'm not too sure what I'm talking about. Is it? Wasn't it the girl referee dressing as a guy?

“Anyway, I cannot accept that you're sending us into prison one-sidedly without listening to our explanations at all.”

“There will be a trial, 'kay.”

“Eh, is that so? That's great...”

“But only when someone willing to argue for Cru-chan and the others shows up, 'kay.”

“Murata, do you know any lawyers?”

“On Earth, yes.”

That's exactly what I thought he would say.

Since we're in a different world, and this is the first time stepping into this country, there's no way we know any lawyers. If we don't know any lawyers, does this mean we can only wait quietly for a hot-blooded lawyer out to rid the world of all injustices to appear?

“Who are you kidding, how could we possibly wait this out.”

“Exactly—”

Maybe he's been infected by her cute actions, because even Murata puts his finger on his chin, speaking with his head slightly tilted.

“And it looks like there won't be a public defender, what to do~~ We'll just have to defend ourselves.”

“Oh, I see.”

As expected of the Daikinja's reincarnation, even if the way he does things isn't all that smart, he's still a lot more creative than someone who joins sports

clubs like me.

Self-representation. Although I don't know if this country has such a system, it is still a good idea. I don't know how to do something like systematically explaining how everything we did is right on the side of the law, but Murata should be able to pull it off.

Damn! If I had known something like this would happen, I would have studied up on how to speak in public as well. If I had seriously read those books on speaking in Aniki's room, then I could proudly say 'I want to defend myself' now. The cover of the book is a picture of a girl, so it should be easy to understand. If I'm not mistaken, the title of the book is... 'How to Capture Hearts with Your Words, Relationship Version.'

Wait a sec! The man who's aiming to be governor in the future, is that all he's thinking about?

"Robin-chan wants to defend himself, then what about Cru-chan and this gentleman over here?"

"Uh—We'll be represented by Murata as well."

I look at him with a pleading gaze.

"Alright, 'kay, I'll record your requests, and send it to the relevant department, 'kay."

"Great, now we can get a trial, right?"

"Yes, of course."

Warden Ranatan smiles brightly, until there are even slight, elegant wrinkle around her eyes, but I mustn't say that aloud. If I want to eat a delicious dinner, I must never mention that.

"When the time comes, there will be a large scale hearing for Cru-chan and the others, 'kay. Except, you guys are number two one four three, 'kay."

"Two..."

I don't even ask how long we have to wait, because after all, you can't solve a hundred cases in one day.

“Then before your turn arrives, please wait patiently in this ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’, ‘kay. It’s an honor to get into our country’s prisons, y’know. Cru-chan, Darco’s prisons are inescapable, the security so tight that there hasn’t been a successful escape in almost two hundred years, ‘kay.”

Darco’s female warden tells me a terrifying number as I’m stunned, even holding up a fingers and waving it beside her cheek as she says,

“It’s really fun, ‘kay—”

How could there be any fun prisons in this world!

Just like that, while waiting for the two one four six hearings before us, we’re temporarily held in the ‘Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison’.

But we’re not like the real criminals here who were convicted and are serving their sentences. Maybe the whole country, starting with Ranatan, believes that I stole, but I definitely didn’t steal any pickled plum stone! Even if no one believes me, I will never admit to a crime I didn’t commit.

And I’m a bit curious about this ‘black-haired’ order as well. Since there could only be black-haired and black-eyed people born among the mazoku, there’s a chance a mazoku comrade is kept here. Being held in a strange faraway land, who knows how scared they are inside.

Since we’re all mazoku, how could I not help them?

“What, have you changed your mind?”

Gwendal seems to have given up, not even frowning anymore as he asks.

“I’m starting to want to escape, but I saw the soldiers lock the door from the outside just now, and the security here is really tight, so it shouldn’t be that easy to break out.”

“Do you want to kick it open?”

“You mean like back then? Because of me.”

I don’t know if it’s because he couldn’t hide it in time, but the tall man smiles unknowingly. Looking up at him, I smile as well, because we’re both

remembering a time in the past when we both kicked open a thick church door.

Ah—I keep feeling like...

“It’s been a long time, since I saw Gwen smile.”

“Is that so?”

“You only ever smile at animals.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. You only ever smile at animals and Greta, you’re always frowning other than that. But the mastermind behind all your suffering is me, it’s always been me causing you trouble.”

“That’s troubling, it seems you still don’t plan on giving up.”

“Sorry ‘bout that.”

“What’s the point of you saying that now? I gave up hope a long time ago, Your Majesty.”

I almost say, “Why are you suddenly so formal with me?” But I see the way he smiles wryly, so I take back those words.

Lord von Voltaire’s ‘Your Majesty’ always has some meaning, but this time it seems there aren’t any negative feelings in it.

Not that it would matter if there were.

1. ↑ —chome is how city districts are numbered in Japan.
2. ↑ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amami_%C5%8Cshima
3. ↑ Sixties anime.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demetan_Croaker,_The_Boy_Frog)
4. ↑ Mikotan (as in Little Miko) sounds like Yuuri's mom's name in chapter 5
5. ↑ The sentence ending ‘-no’, I think, that’s for young girls and children.
Murata explains the rest well enough.
6. ↑ Order, altar, get it?

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

It wasn't easy, but it's finally almost daybreak. Three people and a mysterious object are staring at each other in the ship cabin until their eyes feel dry, but they can't do anything.

The three people are Lord von Christ Günter, his adopted daughter Gisela, and Lord von Bielefeld Wolfram respectively. As for the mysterious object, it's the blonde-haired man poking his head out of the talisman made of one hundred percent Günter hair, 'Günter's Protection'.

To be precise, that object can only stick out everything about the neck and the right arm by pushing the pouch opening to its widest. As for what's underneath that, no one can imagine it. If they were to let their new king, His Majesty Yuuri see that, his expression would probably change drastically as he said, "This does not obey the laws of physics!" Thank goodness he wasn't around.

The first impression the man with sparkly golden hair gives off, is that he looks a lot like someone from the von Bielefeld family, but the aura he gives off is completely different.

His eyes are as cold as ice reflecting the sky, but their color is like a roaring blue flame, so he doesn't feel very kind or gentle. The type that wouldn't really laugh even if he heard a joke.

Maybe it's because he emits such an unapproachable, stern aura, that he doesn't feel annoying even though he's semi-naked. Or maybe it's because his armpit hair is nicely hidden by the pouch.

But that man, in such a state, suddenly...

"Hi, I'm Shinou! Even if I said that, I bet no one would believe me immediately."

“But even if you didn’t say that, we still don’t plan on sharing any of our energy with you.”

The Pouch Man looks at the wary Günter discontentedly.

The man had even tried desperately to break free from the pouch just now, and possibly gave up at the end because it was just too tight, so now he has to settle with only showing off his head and right arm.

But the troubled ones here are the three mazoku onboard the ship, because there’s no way they can leave someone who calls himself Shinou lying on the ground. After many failed attempts, Günter finally learns his lesson and places him on the chair, so he can lean his head on the chair, not only to maintain his balance but also to protect his dignity.

His blonde hair covering his neck, with blue eyes underneath his long lashes, the Pouch Man looks younger than Günter, but his attitude is very arrogant. And he even calls himself the ancestor of mazokus—Shinou.

“What to do... Goodness, what do I do?”

“Please calm down, Your Excellency. I can understand your suspicions as to whether this is His Majesty Shinou, but since he’s in this sort of place...”

Gisela looks down at the Pouch Man on the chair, her expression turning rather complicated. As for the trembling in her cheeks, that’s because she’s trying very hard not to smile.

“Pfft! To appear in a place like this, proves that he is indeed no ordinary person. Because an ordinary man couldn’t possibly come out of a talisman pouch.”

“Of course I don’t think he’s an ordinary man! But Gisela, this is our beloved His Majesty Shinou, y’know!? Have you ever thought that His Majesty Shinou would descend to our world in a place like this!?”

The person in question just looks at Günter’s panicking with a stunned expression,

“There’s no need to be so formal. Because there’s some pretty decent maryoku gathered in here, and it’s made of this hundred percent hair too, only

the maryoku inside the pouch seems even smaller than I imagined, that's why it can't form my entire body."

"What did you say--?"

Behind the open door, Wolfram demands loudly from the chair on the deck. He's at least twenty adult steps away from this side. This is in order to prevent him from accidentally touching the Box, so they deliberately made him leave.

It is said that even when it is spoken in a foreign language, people can still tell between good words and bad ones. Even though Wolfram is so far away, he can still sense people badmouthing him—despite not knowing exactly what's being said.

The maryoku sealed inside the pouch is Wolfram's maryoku, and if he were to hear that... his maryoku is unexpectedly small, he would surely blow his top, so Günter hurriedly replies,

"It's nothing, y'know—Wolfram—Nothing at all!"

Pouch Man mutters,

"Pretty stuck-up, ain't he."

"How troubling, he's always like that, his stubbornness is always so hard for us to handle."

"Oh~~ I understand his personality fairly well, to think that his stubbornness is very different depending on whether I'm watching it from afar or experiencing it first-hand."

"You're saying you've seen Wolfram before?"

"That's right."

There's a smile on the corners of his lips as he glances sideways at the father-daughter pair of Günter and Gisela.

"I believe you two know it as well, he's more than just a stubborn brat. Since I'm the father of all mazoku, of course I have to watch over my children properly. Isn't that so!?"

"Y-you watch over everyone?"

“That’s right... No, you don’t have to worry, I have no interest in vulgar things, and I don’t watch all of you all day long, after all I only have two eyes. However...”

Before saying those important words, he smiles intriguingly,

“I know you’re calling the woolen doll you confiscated from Lord von Voltaire Julia, and you talk to it every night too, Gisela.”

“Eh? Is that so, Gisela?”

“I-i-i-i-i-i-it’s not like that--!”

Gisela’s usually ferocious expression turned really white in an instant, so it seems to be true.

“You even told the woolen doll who your crush is.”

“N-n-n-n-n-n-nooo--! Please forgive me! Please spare me, Your Majesty Shinou! Don’t say it, I’m begging you, don’t say anymore--!”

Gisela kneels down like a young girl praying.

“Who is it? Who on earth is it, Gisela!?”

It’s slow to describe but quick to happen, in a flash she has already lifted the heavy wooden bed and thrown it at Günter. After all, right now she’s wearing those gloves Anissina invented, which could give a weak female shopowner the strength of a hundred men.

“I say, Günter, that’s not something a father should ask. But in that case, you should be willing to believe that I am the Shinou you speak of, right?”

“Excuse me!”

However, the father over here has eyes sparkling like the twinkling stars in the night sky, so much so that even the wild blonde-haired man can’t help but shirk away from him.

“How many secrets of mine do you know?”

“Mmph...”

He hesitates for a while, and finally frowns in displeasure,

“You dare ask, too, when you know you don’t have any secrets that would trouble you if I found out.”

“Eh—In that case there’s not enough evidence for me to believe you’re His Majesty Shinou, now what do we do?”

“The way you’re suspecting my status like this, if we were back in my time you would have been executed on the spot long ago.”

He continues muttering,

“To think that I’ve gotten softer too. Back in the past, I was very much respected and idolized, so although I never oppressed anyone with my power, no one dared to raise up their heads and look at me directly either. Especially Lord von Christ, I expected you would perform a spray all the way to the ceiling and then faint.”

What—a pity.

“That’s because, um—Your Majesty Shinou... Your Majesty’s appearance is a little problematic as well—”

“What are you talking about?”

They’re talking about the way he has his head and one arm sticking out of a disgusting pouch, and so it’s inevitable that his identity was suspected. But this man does not feel inferior in the slightest, his confidence even rivaling the currently absent Lady von Karbenikoff Anissina.

“Then ask me some questions only I can answer. I will answer all of them, so I would then prove that I’m the founder of Shin Makoku, yes?”

“Oh~~ I see, you are absolutely right. As expected of... the man who calls himself His Majesty Shinou, you are indeed intelligent. Then I’ll ask right away, uh—Something only His Majesty Shinou knows...”

Lord von Christ flips his beautiful long hair, saying with his head lowered disappointedly,

“...Come to think of it, I’m not very clear about those matters.”

“After all, you’re still a wee young strapper who’s not even two hundred.”

“How lacking in knowledge...”

“Then why don’t you ask what color Ulrike’s underwear is? Only I know that.”

The prime minister refuses dejectedly,

“I never want to know that sort of thing, ever.”

“Then let me ask!”

Günter and the temporarily-Shinou turn around to see Gisela standing up with an expression of determination and gripping her hands tightly. Although she finally managed to regain her senses, the poor thing still has tears in her eyes.

“Where’s the rest of your body? No, more importantly, in these past thousands of years, where in the world were you, and what kind of life were you living?”

“Oh~~ That, huh.”

The temporarily-Shinou, also known as the man who looks like Pouch Man, knocks his head with his right hand, saying in a voice that started civilizations,

“Speaking of that~~ I didn’t have a physical body to start with, but that’s something you can imagine. Living alone all this time as a spiritual body, I was looking for an entrance to the real world when I just happened to find a gathering of maryoku that was in pretty decent shape, which is...”

He uses the tip of his fingers to pull at the hair from the pouch,

“Lord von Bielefeld’s maryoku was sealed up in a hundred percent hair, and became a perfect exit that connected the space I was in to this world. From where I’m at, this is just like a little round window made of transparent ice. Then, the second I passed through that little round window, I used the maryoku gathered there to make this thing that looks like a body physical. In other words... it’s like how when a bubble rises from the bottom of a marsh, the mud will fill with air and swell up. However, observe!”

“Ah!”

Temporarily-Shinou quickly grabs Gisela’s hand, even though she had instinctively braced herself to back away, and allows her fair fingers to grab him.

“However, this body isn’t as frail as mud. In any case, as long as the maryoku in this pouch can maintain it, it won’t melt or crumble away. The strength of the maryoku is still problematic, though.”

And then, deliberately, he sighs exaggeratedly,

“Relying on that guy’s power, it seems the most I can do is show my head and right arm. If he were stronger, I should be able to present my entire body.”

“Then you’re saying, that if it were Lady Cheri or Anissina...?”

“Aaah, my adorable Cheri, and Anissina as well. If it were their maryoku, I might be able to present myself until you can tell my gender. How troublesome, now I finally understand exactly how much my country relies on Anissina.”

“That is indeed not something to be proud of.”

“In that case, Your Majesty’s true body...”

Gisela is confused. It seems she’s wondering whether to research this from a medical or maryoku point of view, and it’s frustrating her.

“It’s still in the space I exist in, it hasn’t rotted.”

Upon hearing this, an image of the Poison Lady’s lab appears instantly in Gisela’s mind. Temporarily-Shinou’s body should be together with the seaweed and shells, submerged in a huge tank filled with a strange liquid.

“I do not plan on telling you where this space is, because explaining would be a pain. I can tell you that the feel and flow of time there is different from this world. You can pretend it’s the area between the first and second floor of the temple, if you will.”

“For the past few millennia, you were always waiting there?”

“That’s right, in sprit form.”

Wordlessly, Günter and Gisela remember something the current Maou Yuuri said. He said that people who mope around at home without ever taking a step outside are called ‘hikikomori’, and they’re a very serious social problem in Japan. Ah, by moping at home, he means these people don’t study or work, relying completely on their parents for a living, and stay at home doing absolutely nothing. Hikikomoris are really bad.

Hikikomori...

Really don't want to think that. But even though they don't want to think that, he is indeed the legendary man who, sulking after the Daikenja disappeared a few thousand years ago, decided to leave this world and hid in his temple, never to be seen again. Who knew that the father of the mazoku, the founder of Shin Makoku is actually this sort of person.

Hikikomoris are really bad.

Whenever they think about Yuuri-heika's pure smile and innocent words, the Shinou in their hearts slowly crumbles away.

"What's the matter~"

"N-nothing, nothing at all."

The father and daughter try to diffuse the awkwardness of the situation, desperately making up tons of excuses. One could say they're fighting on the front line.

"Just thinking that you continued watching over us people even as a spirit, makes me so touched that the tears and snot just come flowing."

"Yes, that's exactly right. But your appearance now is so incomplete, you poor thing... It's just, such thoughts are truly a show of great disrespect towards you."

"Hmph, since it's been a real long time since I returned here, I'll just have to deal with it."

Do you really plan on keeping this appearance temporarily! Even if the von Christ father and daughter duo feel impatient inside, they can't show it on their faces.

The man who popped out of the pouch to say 'Good afternoon', seems to be His Majesty Shinou himself. Except it's midnight now, so he should say 'Good night'.

Since he's using such a vulgar... no, since he's not using any ma-powered devices, and travelling through space using such a strange method, it probably requires a great deal of maryoku, huh. Too bad they can't think of anyone else with both things.

“Hey--! Are you guys listening? And Your Majesty Shinou--!”

“That guy, on the other hand, he actually dares to call Günter and Gisela, his elders, ‘you guys’?”

Shinou looks at the beautiful face similar to his, saying disdainfully,

“Wolf sure is stuck-up, despite how cute he is when talking in his sleep.”

“You even know that he talks in his sleep!? D-d-d-don’t tell me you’ve heard His Majesty Yuuri’s sleep-talk as well?”

“I have, so? The things Yuuri says are pretty descriptive, mostly about ‘assassination’, ‘dead’ and the like. It’s making me wonder recently, is he really a pacifist?”

“If you’re talking about Yuuri, I want in as well!”

“Ah, I forgot this.”

Ignoring everyone else’s surprise, Gisela runs up to Wolfram and passes some cylindrical object to him, stunned on his chair. When she jogs back to the other side, she has a cylinder identical to the one she have Wolfram in her hands.

“This is the New Ma-powered Wired Telephone, a Poison Lady invention.”

“Gisela, it looks like you’re not on very good terms with Anissina, so why do you have so many of the ma-powered devices she invented?”

“Oh dear, Your Excellency.”

She raises her eyebrow in surprise, as though saying, ‘You don’t even know this much?’

“If I don’t buy it and use it, I won’t be able to file complaints about it.”

She smiles innocently, speaking as though she’s an expert in complaints.

“But this truly is a flawless item, one of the rare success cases amongst the Queen’s Inventions. Although I’m extremely reluctant to say it, this really is very convenient. The only thing is that it has a condition that must be fulfilled before it can be used.”

“W-what condition? Since the Poison Lady is involved, it must be some strange condition.”

“After speaking, you must say ‘Mr Gorilla’.”

Günter, taken down by Gisela’s perfectly serious tone, also nods and replies seriously,

“I got it, ‘Mr Gorilla’, is it?”

“That’s right, or the effect of the ma-power will be broken. Ah, Your Excellency Wolfram, hold on, please pull the string taut...”

Shinou thinks to himself, ‘Is that really a ma-powered device?’ But he doesn’t mention it to the three. After all, to him, all mazoku women are very adorable. If he were on Earth, he would probably add ‘Baby’ to the back of all their names.

Cheri Baby, Gisela Baby, even Anissina is no exception, though it gives him goosebumps. My adorable Anissina... If he called her that to her face, even His Majesty Shinou would most likely be tossed to the ends of the universe.

But there’s no need to deliberately put down that adorable little thing’s inventions, so he might as well assume it’s a ma-powered device.

“Ah—Ah—Ah--- Yes, yes, yes, can you hear me--? Mr Gorilla.”

“I hear you, Wolfram, Mr Gorilla.”

“Then I’ll get to the point and ask, Mr Gorilla.”

That’s not the voice that always complains loudly things like ‘cheater’ and ‘flirt’.

“What on earth was the phenomenon I started just now?”

“Oh, that.”

Shinou resists the urge to smile. He must act the way the other party hopes he would, and give the answer the other party is hoping for. On the other hand, Gisela hands the New Ma-powered Wired Telephone’s receive to the blonde man, feeling touched inside her mind.

To think her adopted father’s knitted pouch can speak! And speak what may potentially be extremely important national secrets as well!

“It’s a reaction by a part of the Box inside your body.”



“A, part, of, the, Box?”

“Lord von Bielefeld Wolfram, you are the Key to ‘Inferno on the Tundra’. And the same goes for your two older brothers, Lord von Voltaire Gwendal and Lord Weller Conrart, the Keys of the Boxes of Earth and Wind are hosted on their

bodies respectively.”

“I am... the Key?”

“Didn’t you sense it slightly?”

“But... To think... I...”

The voice coming from the New Ma-powered Wired Telephone breaks suddenly, and Gisela hurriedly picks up the receiver, yelling, ‘Mr Gorilla’. So close so close, she couldn’t believe that they forgot to add that line after speaking.

“By the way, I might as well tell you that the so-called ‘Key’ is merged with the soul, so if the wielder dies, their soul would transfer to the next wielder as well, do you get that? Mr Gorilla.”

“But Your Majesty Shinou—”

Günter interrupts without thinking,

“What on earth is the so-called ‘Key’? In regards to that, I truly cannot understand...”

“The Key is a part of the Box, in other words, a part of the soushu.”

The three who cannot deduce his meaning fall silent, six gazes fixed together onto Shinou, showing only his head and arm.

“Think back to the distant past before history, when we sealed the soushus into the Boxes of Destruction, we gave a piece of them to the people who fought with us. Hiding a part of the soushu into their souls was to control the threat of them being released, and that is the Key. As a result, if the person acting as the Key prepared well enough beforehand, they will be able to control the power of the soushu even if the Box is opened.”

“A part... of the soushu...”

“That’s right, so if you simply come closer there’s a high chance you’ll be affected by those guys, thus attracted to them. Because things separated from the same place will merge together. Do you understand now? Mr Gorilla.”

“Then when I was attracted to the ‘Inferno on the Tundra’ earlier...”

“That should be the reason, Mr Gorilla.”

Shinou is being surprisingly cooperative.

“And you approached it after taking off this hundred per cent hair amulet, right? Of course there would be resonance, you really have no sense of danger at all, Mr Gorilla.”

“Eh? Eh? Does that mean the ‘Günter’s Protection’ I weaved has such an effect?”

“It seems to have one or two uses as an amulet.”

On the other end of the line, Wolfram falls into deep thought, speaking up angrily after some time,

“In that case my brothers are in danger as well? If they simply approached the Boxes, they would be attracted as I was, and may even be swallowed by that power, is that right? Mr Gorilla.”

“That is correct. But ‘End of the Earth’ and ‘Wind’s End’ aren’t near the two of them now, which is the silver lining amidst all this mess.”

“Then the reason Your Majesty Shinou showed up personally was to save His Excellency Wolfram, was it?”

Gisela stops there, rather than continuing ‘looking like that’.

“About that, that’s a reason too. But the bigger reason is that I hope you will deal with those Boxes in a different manner.”

“No way, Mr Gorilla... Ah, no, I’m not using the wired telephone, so it should be okay, right?”

They did plan on throwing away the ‘Inferno on the Tundra’ they brought out from Seisakoku, because Yuuri said ‘throw the Box away’, and that way they wouldn’t be blamed by others.

But what if the ‘ancestor of the mazoku’, the ‘founding father’ His Majesty Shinou, thinks differently from the current maou? As the king’s people, who should the mazoku listen to?

Perhaps sensing their expressions of confusion, Shinou waves his right hand in denial,

“No, don’t you misunderstand now, I’m not asking you to disobey your king, I just want to suggest a place to throw it away to. Think about it, Wolf, how did Yuuri say it? Mr Gorilla?”

“He said he hopes it can be sunk in a part of the sea where fishing boats rarely pass.”

“See, don’t you get it now?”

Shinou stretches his right hand lightly beside his head, as beautifully as a ballet dancer on water,

“To you guys, he might be an ideal maou, but his knowledge about the Boxes and Keys is lacking. After all, other than me, who personally sealed away the soushu and divided the Keys to the four warriors, there’s no one else who understand the Boxes and the Keys better. This is what I want to say, so listen carefully.

The truth is, he’s the man who saved the world from destruction, who grabbed humanity from the soushu’s clutches, so naturally Shinou’s words have their own level of persuasion.

“These Boxes may be dangerous, but we can’t just let them be used by the humans either, that’s why throwing them away should be the best method, throwing them away in a place where humans can’t reach. But the four Boxes each have their suitable resting places, and it’s not the bottom of the ocean as you thought.”

More importantly, Shinou doesn’t deny the current maou Yuuri’s opinion, so they don’t feel any suspicions towards him.

Both the kings want to throw away the Boxes, to a place humans can’t reach.

Günter asks carefully,

“Then where should we throw ‘Inferno on the Tundra’ to...?”

“To the space I created.”

Shinou smiles a surprisingly strategist-like smile, pointing at the Box of Fire on his left with his chin,

“Wolfram, command Sizemore to speed up the vessel. Get this thing back to

our country as soon as possible, and seal it in the space where I've retired to, a place where the humans can never reach. In order to not let the Boxes be controlled by the soushu, this is the smartest way to do it."

Gisela feels as though she's been cheated, her head hurting so much she wants to massage her temples.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

The rooms are distributed to us from shortest to tallest.

From shortest to tallest, what a nostalgic term.

When I was in elementary and middle school, we used 'from shortest to tallest' a lot, but once I went to high school, it was replaced by the stiff-sounding 'according to height'. I tend to be in the middle when it comes to height placements in the class, so even if it's from shortest to tallest, I don't find any particular problem in it.

That's how it's usually like.

"But if the rooms here are arranged from shortest to tallest, won't that mean Gwen can't stay with us!?"

Exactly.

My height is about the same as Murata's, those few centimeters that can't be differentiated with the naked eye almost within a margin of error, so we should end up in the same room, but it's different for Gwen.

Although his voice is low, his body is actually very tall, belonging to an especially tall group even among the mazoku. If I were to compare myself to him, the difference would be like that of a telephone pole and a cicada, like an adult and a child. If we were lining up on the field, it would probably be the distance between the first to the one outside the school gate.

So when the prison guard with the belly sticking out says that outside the third heavily-guarded gate, I can't help but exclaim loudly,

"Are you kidding me!?"

"This is no joke"

Murata, Gwendal and I get past the nightmarish zombie area safely, and pass through an area where the convicts are quieter too.

What's strange is that the deeper we go into the jail, the more normal the soldiers' and guards' language gets. There aren't any scary moe-style sentence endings anymore, or tones so respectful they make your knees weak.

In front of that third gate, that prison guard said that rooms are arranged from shortest to tallest, so that tall guy must share a room with someone else. He scratches his pot belly as he says that.

This is the 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison' that would make even crying children shut up. When it comes to prisons, all I know from movies and TV is that they're full of violence, taking sides and gangsters.

To be in this kind of place, and now to be separated from Lord von Voltaire. That would become really dangerous.

"I wonder, is this a Japanese-style stern surveillance prison, or an American-style super free-and-easy prison--?"

Murata sure sounds carefree, though.

"Although the Japanese style is restrictive, your personal safety is somewhat guaranteed; the American style is more loose, but it's also more dangerous. You can really feel the FREEDOM. Ah, in South East Asia, there are even places where the whole village is a detention facility."

"N-no matter what, the Japanese style is better, since I do love the island country."

"I highly recommend South East Asia as well, where you have to earn your own food and living fees in the prison."

"How? We don't have any family members to visit and give us things."

"Do you even have to ask? Of course we should do business in the prison. Leave that to me, I've already watched up to the fourth season of 'Prison Break'. There are loads of other methods, but once we got it starting we can really make it big."

I briefly dream of our making it big, while at the same time encouraging baseball as a sporting trend, just like 'baseball in a fence', wouldn't that be

interesting?

“No no no, forget it. We don’t plan on staying here for long anyway. We need to find the ‘black-haired’, and then ask them to speed up our trial, prove our innocence, and then leave this country.”

Although the prison guards are staring at me, the suspect (definitely not a convict) who daydreams one second and sighs the next, it’s not long before a short soldier brings in a man, and pushes him in front of us,

“Ah—here he is, here he is, the one who will be sharing a room with the tall guy is this...”

But before the prison guard can say his name, Gwen calls it out first,

“Chevalier, why are you here...”

Since I’ve travelled here so many times from Earth, and I’m getting to know more and more people of Shin Makoku, to me, Chevalier is a rather important existence.

After all, on the day when I first came to this world, I met him in that extravagant maou-designated bath. More precisely speaking, I met the previous maou, in other words the current Her retired Majesty Lady von Spitzberg Cäcilie, the woman warrior, in the bath.

Curly golden hair and clear blue eyes, a beautiful figure, a muscular body with no excess fat, this beautiful young man (though he could be a middle-aged man for all I know) who reminds people of Greek statues, he is the most beloved of the love hunter, Lady von Spitzberg Cäcilie. They always show up together, I could even say that wherever Lady Cheri is, he would be there too.

I met him before a few times in the bath, the coliseum, and in Dai Shimaron, so our relationship is about that close.

But it does feel very weird to see a familiar face in a faraway foreign land. Although I pull my senses back to reality in that instant, it still feels like I’m in the bath in Blood Pledge Castle, only the weather isn’t that hot, yet his top half is naked. Maybe he just wants to show off that body he’s so proud of.

Just then my old man’s words run through my mind—“You’d be threatened by

a buff guy in leather too, y'know."

But that's his personal freedom, so to hell with it.

"On the other hand, Chevalier, why are you in a foreign prison like this? This is 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison', y'know? If you hadn't committed a crime, or were falsely accused like we were, logically speaking you shouldn't show up in a place like this."

"In that case, that means you are only here because you were framed?"

Although he's not as muscular as Adalbert or Josak, his strong yet slender arms wrap around his chest as he nods his head, going "mm, mm, mm". Even the golden curls plastered to his forehead shake in tandem.

"I thought so, since Your Majesty hates law-breaking so much, it should be impossible that you would do anything bad. Lady Cheri says that all the time too, she says she likes Your Majesty Yuuri's overly straightforward personality. Ah, your sexy black hair and eyes are very beautiful too, of course, even she really worships them."

"But of course, her cuteness is the real deal."

Chevalier says with a smile. There are wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, which only makes him look even friendlier. But his features are too proper, looking at him is like looking at the plaster bust in art class.

"Unfortunately, however, I have also fallen to the point where I cannot meet Lady Cheri."

"Ah, that's right, Chevalier. What in the world did you do!? When were you sent to a place like this!?"

He said he would lead us, so we tail behind him, walking towards the innermost part of the prison. Still, where would this building that looks like an eel's nest stretch to?

We are now walking down a corridor on the first floor, the ceiling stretching to the third floor above us. The second and third floors on either side of us are like balconies stretching outwards, lined by ordinary jail cells with continuous bars. I can't tell how many room there are from our position, but this is basically a

gigantic prison.

Even if they limit it to two or four people per room, how many people can they hold at the maximum?

And in the deepest recesses of this 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison', it's neither a Japanese-style stern surveillance prison, nor an American-style super free-and-easy prison, and of course it's not kind in South East Asia where you only realize it's a village after you walk in.

When the prison guard opens the third door, we are immediately rendered speechless.

The inside is sparkling.

And the walls aren't pure white like in a hospital either, it's a butter and lime color that emphasizes a family atmosphere. The floor underfoot isn't concrete or spotted stone either, but cure ceramic dotted with small flowers. On the walls and ceiling of the third floor, there are even blue skies and white clouds painted like in a child's room.

What an unexpectedly wholesome prison!

More precisely, it's a modern and at the same time fantastical prison. It's like the facilities you see introduced on the educational channel at 9.30pm. I wouldn't be surprised if there were patchwork decorations by Nakajima Kathy^[1] in there as well.

When I first came here I was shocked to find out that the prison warden was a woman, so this must surely be Warden Ranatan's preference. It looks like her taste is a lot like my mom's.

And not only aren't the inmates causing trouble, most of them are all smiles. I look around as I walk, and notice that the men on the benches or by the tables are either reading books or playing with string patterns, or holding a pale green teacup with one hand as they chat. Everyone's expressions are very calm.

Sometimes there's even a man or two who would wave and yell, 'Hi~~ Mr Chevalier.' Of course, they're not leather-bound buff guys.

What an awesome prison! I really can't figure it out, why would this paradise-

like place be called Prison 1-Chome? Who on earth gave it this name?

Seeing our confused expression, Chevalier says softly as well,

“So you guys are shocked too, huh? Although I’ve only been here for about ten days, this really is a surprising prison.”

“Seriously—”

Murata ignores the multiple choice question and stares at the pictures on the ceiling, mouth gaping, before he grips the cloth with thick horizontal stripes on his shoulder,

“The only thing that could use some more work is the design of the inmates’ uniforms.”

“Be patient with it, at least the clothes are freshly laundered, that’s already very good.”

The distributed uniforms aren’t orange jumpsuits nor are they grey working clothes, but instead they’re very striking red and white horizontal stripes.

Murata and I are wearing wide prison uniforms just like everyone else, but Chevalier has pulled the top half down and tied them around his waist.

The worst off is Lord von Voltaire. Although he looks really good in clothes with deep colors and simple tailoring, the prison uniform with red and white horizontal stripes is unbearable on him. In the first few minutes, Murata and I couldn’t help but laugh out loud.

Although their hair and eye colors are different, but the red color really brings out everyone else’s white skin. Speaking of which, since we entered this area, I haven’t seen anyone with copper skin like those fishermen. Could it be that men of the sea never do bad things?

“Since the inside is full of a warm family atmosphere, why is the entrance like a zombie area? And the facilities are really filthy too, the prisoners really loud, so much so that it feels really scary.”

“Ohh~~ The convicts there are on probation.”

“Probation?”

“That’s right.”

He walks ahead and looks back as he speaks, the muscles on his shoulder blade and back moving in tandem.

“The ones there are prisoners whose sentence is almost up, and are going to return to the outside world. They just have to stay there for three days then they can leave.”

“Eh? If they’re about to leave, why are they so rowdy?”

“Because they don’t want to leave.”

They don’t want to leave prison? Why would there be convicts that weird? Since they’ve been kept in this prison for so long, they should be dying to return to society where their friends and family are waiting.

“Well, after all staying in here is really comfortable—”

“The world outside is very harsh, that’s why they need to stay in a dirty cell for a few days, so they can adapt to the outside world.”

What kind of topsy-turvy mentality is this?

“Wait a sec—Ranatan said no one ever broke out of prison for the past two thousand years, that’s also because...”

“It must be that no one ever wanted to break out in the first place.”

“What is this, how could there be such a heavenly prison? It’s making me wonder whether jail is a good or bad thing—”

Only Lord von Voltaire’s expression is cold,

“To make the place where you imprison bad guys so comfortable, how ridiculous. Isn’t it far too unfair for bad guys to get better treatment than the people working hard in society outside?”

“You’re exactly right... But I’m really saved this time, to be honest I was always extremely nervous. Since I was put into prison even though I’m obviously innocent, I really didn’t know what to do.”

“You could say it’s our good luck, huh, and then? Was Chevalier falsely accused as well?”

“No, unfortunately, I can hardly claim to be wholly innocent, as the fact is I accidentally infringed into their territorial waters.”

“Infringing territorial waters--?”

I remember, I always hear this stuff in the television news, like when a suspicion boat infringes into Japanese territorial waters, and how the naval customs reacted excellently. But Chevalier should have been with Lady Cheri, since wherever Lady Cheri is, Chevalier would be there too.

I simply can't imagine that Her Majesty the former queen Lady von Spitzberg Cäcilie would ride on a suspicious boat. Since she always takes a luxury liner, even if the patrol boats ask for her identity, she shouldn't be held and investigated as long as she told them where she was from.

“Where you on some suspicious boat?”

“No no no, of course not! I was on the perfect little boat Lord Fanfan prepared for milady.”

“But you were arrested anyway?”

Chevalier scratches his messy golden curls lightly,

“That's right, according to the navigation map I was looking at, we were supposed to be in public domain... Maybe we drifted into this country's territory without me realizing it. Unfortunately, the one steering the wheel at the time wasn't Lord Fanfan, but me instead.”

“So you were captured?”

“Yes, and now I await trial in here. I deeply apologize, as a citizen of Shin Makoku, I ended up committing a crime in a foreign country, how shameful of me.”

“Be more careful next time.”

Gwendal's voice turns a little unpleasant.

“I truly have nothing to say, Your Excellency. However, I am glad the person who has to take responsibility isn't the ship's owner, Lord Fanfan, but me instead. If Lord Fanfan was arrested on the spot, Lady Cheri would surely be heartbroken.”

“Chevalier...”

That is the best certification for a man who will give everything for love. Seeing his unregretful smile, we are in turn lost for words.

“To think you adore Lady Cheri that much.”

“That is only natural, milady to me is like a flower, the sea and the ocean.”

Gwendal stops dead in his tracks suddenly, groaning as though he swallowed a frog. Who knows whether Chevalier noticed it or not, but he continues with a dazzling smile at us,

“Because I live for her, this feeling of loving a person, it truly is wonderful!”

But to Lord von Voltaire, it doesn’t seem particularly wonderful.

Gwendal is standing in the middle without moving a muscle, biting down hard on his lip and gripping his fists tightly, glaring at the sky as though there’s some unseen enemy there.

Maybe he realized that his words hurt Gwendal, so Chevalier doesn’t go over to him, just lacing his fingers under his chin and looking at him.

Thinking an arena battle of love is about to commence, Murata and I whisper to each other excitedly... I mean, uneasily.

Now I finally understand how moms feel like when they’re looking forward to the afternoon drama series, I wonder, will someone yell, ‘You homewrecker!’ But they’re both men, and one of them is even the son of the main female character.

“Still—This doesn’t mean anything, does it? In the past she always had a lover in Mr Fanfan, so now all we got is another guy who has a crush on her.”

“The troubling part is that there’s another father candidate, isn’t it?”

“If they were to get married, it would be really awkward, wouldn’t it? Back when the owner of my soul was alive, there are some memories of mazoku not really caring about the formalities of marriage. But what’s wrong about their mother marrying someone else they know? The three of them are all adults now, after all.”

To think Murata would be that cool, if it was me I’d be really troubled. If my

mother married someone I know very well—for example, if she decided to remarry to Conrad. Well, he is the person who named me after all^[2], so it seems not much would change even if he became my dad?

I try to imagine that scene.

“...I-I can’t!”

If it ever comes to that, we’d probably beg for her to stop, crying. My father, my brother and I, all three of us would get on our knees if it meant stopping that from happening.

“True, that is hard to imagine in the Shibuya household—”

“No no, I really can’t accept it!”

And then the previous Maou’s oldest son starts mumbling something in a weak voice, so much so that we can’t hear it even though he’s three steps away from us. Seeing him like that from a side is actually slightly scary.

“What is he doing? Could he be that he’s cursing Chevalier? Or does he not want any more little brothers?”

“I see, so what he means that it’s enough until Lord von Bielefeld?”

“Should we tell him that there’s a chance he’ll get a little sister as well?”

“Ah—you’re right—For all we know, he may get an adorable little sister who calls him ‘Nii-chan’. And twins too, twins with completely different personalities! One is mature and gentle, the other one is competitive and tough.”

“I always thought only our Shouri would feel happy hearing things like that, to think Murata is quite well-versed in this area as well.”

“Oh dear—I just easily get passionate over something, and then I fall into it without knowing—”

I throw aside that unfortunate piece of imagination about my family, and try to imagine Gwendal as an older brother instead. That eldest son, carrying a chubby baby in his arms gently.

“...He looks really happy.”

“Ah, he’s turning around to look at Chevalier!”

Gwendal, who had previously been staring at the sky, turns around to face that man passionately in love with his mother, and holds his hands tightly.

“Waa—he finally seems to have recognized him as his mother’s boyfriend.”

Maybe he’s regained his sanity, for his voice turns back to that usual bass,

“I leave Mother in your hands, please take care of her.”

I bet we’re currently witnessing a special version of ‘Father, give me your daughter!’ But the one acting as the father is the son, and the daughter is his old lady, this difference is too much.

Even if that little skit is so unique, I’m still touched to tears. If I were to find myself in that position in the near future, what should I do? At that time, the fathers would be Wolf and me, and the daughter would be Greta.

Thinking that, I immediately understand Gwendal’s feelings deeply.

Chevalier, on the other hand, flashes him a smile as dazzling as the sun, grasping the hands of his beloved’s son back, and shaking it up and down with force,

“Relax, if you would accept such an immature me, please do leave milady to me! Although her heart is currently with Lord Fanfan, I am willing to keep on waiting.”

What a brave hunk.

“Such romantic words—”

“Oh, Aming^[3]—”

Murata says something that makes me suspect he lied about his age again, but since I understand him, it means I got a problem too. Still, that’s because Okamura Takako is Ishii Hiroo’s^[4] ex-wife.

Just then something seems to sparkle on Chevalier’s finger, something like the champion’s ring of the World Series. There aren’t any gems on it, so it looks like a normal ring to me, but Gwendal seems to tell what it is immediately.

“This is... an insignia, right? Why do you have such a precious thing on you even now?”

I heard the term insignia before. Back then Greta, claiming to be my illegitimate daughter, had used Gegenhuber's insignia to get past the guards and into my room.

Although I was nearly assassinated and did sprain my foot, that item is now full of sentimental value, and it's also the lucky item that led me to meet Greta.

But the mazoku's insignia ring should only be found on previous maous and their heirs. As for Hube, the Grisela family has had many maous, so it's not surprising that they would have this ring.

"No, I usually hide it, or wear it around my neck on a string."

"Oh—Let me see, what's the diagram on it? An animal? Or a plant? Günter asked me what was on it before too, does this mean that someone in Chevalier's family was a maou?"

"About that, Your Majesty, the truth is..."

He touches the back of his head awkwardly,

"It was me..."

"Oh, it was Chevalier, huh... What--!?"



I can't help but yell out loud, Gwendal and I both so shocked our jaws nearly drop. As for Murata, he looks completely calm, his expression even saying, 'something like that is actually very likely'.

"W-what did you just say, Chevalier?"

“You said you were the maou!?”

“That’s right, that’s what I said.”

“Eh, aren’t you Lady Cheri’s butler?”

The image of the previous maous in my mind is slowly dissolving. At the rate things are going, soon the image of the priestesses and Shinou will fall apart too. I get the feeling that’s not too far in the future.

“B-but, when we first met in Blood Pledge Castle, you were a very excellent back scrubber in the bath, and even after that you were always Lady Cheri’s, Her Majesty the Queen’s favorite servant, right? And yet now you’re telling me you’re the maou... When, where, and how did you become the maou!?”

“If you ask me where, of course that would be in Shin Makoku. As for when, I was the generation before milady, which makes me the 25th maou.”

We’re standing, unmoving, in the middle of the prison, dejected one second and shocked another. Other people watching us probably think we’re actors, and the prisoners who were standing around before are now approaching us with interest.

“T-then why don’t I know you?”

“That’s unsurprising, because only this insignia can prove that I was maou. Add that to the fact that unlike other maous, I don’t have a portrait, and the people who used to serve me in the castle had long since retired to the countryside, living the rest of their lives peacefully.”

By the staircases and corridors of Blood Pledge Castle, it is indeed true that we don’t have portraits of the 25th and 26th maous.

“That was because I upset the castle’s painter, I said that such a lifeless portrait can be done after I’m dead, and I think that line hurt his ego as an artist.”

I always thought it was because the portraits aren’t done yet, who knew something like that happened.

“And when I was in power, I ruled the ministers with a curtain between us.”

“You mean ruling from behind a curtain!?” What’s up with this world?

There's a cross-dressing masked lady leader, there's also twins who are both boy kings of large countries, there's even an obviously old uncle-aged His Majesty with a bowl cut and a cartoony voice, and even a prison warden who's obviously auntie-aged and yet talks like a moe-character. Now we have another king who ruled from behind the curtain, and who looks completely like a civilian.

And at the same time, he even fell in love with the beautiful queen who succeeded him, hiding his identity to be a servant by her side.

"Among the kings I met in the past, there are indeed some who meet guests from behind a curtain, but how are there kings in this world who complete their reign without even the domestic ministers and personal subordinates knowing his face!?"

It feels like a princess from the Heian period in Japan.

"Back then I was very shy."

"Is this a problem you can solve with just 'very shy'?"

Gwendal finally joins in the conversation again, saying so with an extremely unhappy expression.

Chevalier... No, His retired Majesty Chevalier gives a perplexed smile like a child being scolded,

"Ah, but of course I showed my face to a few people who were close to me, only those people resigned when I abdicated, and each of them left the castle. Also, don't judge me by how I look now, I underwent body modification, so everything was changed from inside out, and I look completely different from what I used to. It's precisely because I'm too different from when I was in power, that the castle painter who wanted to draw the portrait for Blood Pledge Castle met many difficulties. Add that to the fact that the painter may have been annoyed by my words back then, and finally he went underground as well."

"Even if you look different, it shouldn't be that different..."

But if it were Miss Anissina, performing cosmetic surgery with ma-powered devices should be a specialty of hers.

"Back then I swayed unsteadily when I walked, my face was pale and I was

scrawny. If I walked by the beach shirtless, people would taunt me by calling me a ‘summer babe’.”

“That just means that you look really good in a bikini, y’know—”

Murata isn’t affected at all. Even if he has all sorts of memories of different experiences, this sort of calmness is still very precious. How I hope he would come to my team, and guide the players psychologically.

Since he insisted in going shirtless even when he was scrawny, does that mean he just naturally likes going nude? I’m terrified that he would say that when he was ruling behind the curtain, he was in fact completely naked. Could it be that he just likes taking it all off, and that’s why he ruled from behind a curtain?

“But it’s precisely because of her cuteness, that made the weak and helpless me change my mind.”

The nudist says forcefully,

“When Ulrike told me, ‘this is the candidate for the next maou’, and showed me the lady’s image in the crystal ball, I couldn’t help but sigh, ‘how could she be so lovable, so beautiful and so cute!’ I nearly fell backwards while spurting a nose-bleed. Now, I can slightly... No, I am the Chevalier that can rather understand Lord von Christ’s feelings.”

By now Gwendal’s brow has squeezed into a wrinkle that probably won’t disappear for his entire life, and my expression must be really stupid as well.

“After that I became Lady Cheri’s hostage, desperately gathering information about her every day. I used the little time I had left to investigate milady. Sometimes I would send someone to stand guard by her window, sometimes I would send someone to cover her bed with flower, or even fill her bath with blood-red wine... I used all the power I had to the very last drop, doing anything I can to get her fancy. Ah~~ The power of love is great.”

You’re basically a stalker, that’s not something a king should do.

“Shibuya, I was right, wasn’t I?”

“What. Do. You. Mean. Right?”

“I once said, ‘You’re a more impressive king that you imagine’.”

I'm starting to think that too, slightly.

"But I thought Chevalier was really young, even younger than Lady Cheri."

"Hahaha, I'll take that compliment. The secret to my looking younger than my years, is probably wearing shoes without socks."

Just then, as the current maou and novice to Shin Makoku history, I realized something big, "Wait a sec, if Lady Cheri were to marry Chevalier, wouldn't that become a union between the previous queen and the previous previous king? Wouldn't that be the greatest royal couple!?"

"No no no, I have already abandoned my position and my clan name, to live among the people. Now I am merely a man named Chevalier, you don't have to be too formal around me, just call my name as usual!"

"Is that so? I got it, so from now on that's how I'll call you, named Chevalier."

Gwendal speaks before we do, evidently confused.

"Mn, got it, named Chevalier."

Murata is definitely doing it on purpose.

"But what does Lady Cheri think about something so important? Does she know?"

"She shouldn't know, right? After all, we only spoke once at the crowning ceremony, and of course at the time I was behind a curtain as usual. But even so, I'm really worried that she would discover my true identity through my voice, that's why I instinctively speak very little in front of her."

"Come on—is that alright? Didn't you occasionally get tied up in the whip of love?"

"It's okay, because we're not chasing the past, but the future."

There's no malice at all in his words, and when Chevalier answers so determinedly like that, he looks really innocent. To be a pretty boy, it may be very important to maintain that sort of mentality, which is why people like my old man can never do it.

I look at that man in love with some respect in my eyes, but suddenly a color

I'm not used to flashes past my eyes. That's the color I'm long since used to seeing in the mirror and on Earth, but in this world here, it's the color only seen in a starless, moonless night sky.

"Was there something just now?"

"‘Something’?"

Maybe because the direction we're facing is different, Murata doesn't seem to see it, but something black, which is rare in this world, did flash past my line of vision.

"There was something black... No, that was a black haired person! A black-haired man ran over there!?"

"Oh, are you talking about 'Kami Kuro'[\[5\]](#)?"

As I listen to Chevalier's voice coming from behind me, I search for the black-haired man instinctively. However, all I find is Murata and Gwendal following behind me.

"Please wait, you misunderstood, Your... Uh—You guys, it might shock you to hear this, but his black hair is fake."

He chases up to us as he explains,

"That hair was purposely dyed, it's obvious as soon as you look at the roots, because some are blonde and others brown. Here in 'Who Is It Summoning Hell 1-Chome, Ah, Errand-Running 3-Chome Prison', there are many people like that, it seems to be some sort of religion. Others call that religion The Sect of 'Until That Day Comes'.

So that's it, no wonder the people at the port or on the streets didn't make a huge fuss over our black hair, because the people are used to seeing manmade black hair. They think Murata and my hair is dyed too, which is why they said we're companions of the 'black-haired'.

"Why would they want to purposely dye their hair black? Isn't that unlucky?"

"Who knows, that's all I know about that as well. After all, I've only been here awaiting trial for ten days."

"If it's a religion, that may have something to do with their doctrine."

Murata is standing by my side in a second, about hand-holding distance away from me. But his tone is completely different than the calm one just now, maybe he saw something serious about this.

“Dyeing hair is a doctrine?”

“Mn, the truth is most religious doctrines have something to do with hair, like how most Buddhist monks need to shave their heads; Muslim women need to cover up their hair as well as their skin; and even Christians—you know it, haven’t you doodled them on your textbooks?”

“I know, it’s that bald spot in the middle.”

“That was shaved off in the middle, it’s not the same as natural balding. Anyway, many religions have some sort of restriction on hair.”

“But I didn’t doodle in any bald spots... Found him!”

Once again I spot the black-haired man running ahead quickly, and this time I don’t plan on losing him.

Even if his hair is dyed, he still may have other companions, and out of his companions, there may actually be a natural black-haired and black-eyed person, a mazoku with the same physical composition as us.

1. [↑](#) A famous Japanese handicraft artist.
2. [↑](#) "person who named me": nadzukeoya, father: chichioya . That's why a lot wouldn't change.
3. [↑](#) A female Japanese duo from the 70’s, comprised of Okamura Takako and Kato Haruko.
4. [↑](#) Retired Japanese baseball player (of course)
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroo_Ishii)
5. [↑](#) KAMI KURO means 'hair black', but also kami=god; kuro=black. When Ranattan calls Yuuri "Ku-chan" (short for Crusoe=Kuruso), it can also be understood as a short for "kuro" or "kurokami", someone with black hair.

Chapter 8

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The sun is shining brightly in the middle of the sky, piercing his eyes even without him looking up.

When he takes his first step onto solid land, he stretches without a care for others' gazes. Although he has long since gotten used to sailing in boats, he still prefers the feel of land. Just the fact that he doesn't have to sway back and forth, left and right, instead having his feet planted on the ground, makes his emotions a lot steadier.

Just as he's about to pick up his really minimal luggage, he incidentally looks at his own left arm. There are scars everywhere on it. Even his nails are habitually cut short. As for some of the obvious scars, to this day he can still remember when he got them and why.

Feeling as though someone is calling him, he looks up to see two children run over to him from a distance. The girl is waving at him hard, while the boy is carrying a large sack, so forget waving, he can barely even see the road ahead of him.

The children's almost-white blonde hair is flying in the sea breeze coming from the port. Although their limbs are slender, there's already a bit more flesh on them over these past few months^[1].

"Conra, d—"

The two of them still aren't too used to the common language, so they don't call him Conrad or Conrart. They are the shinzoku children who escaped from Seisakoku.

"Zeta, Zuusha. Did you come out here to help the head of the kitchen buy things?"

The children finally make it to their older friend, they're currently working as kitchen apprentices in the merchant vessel Conrad just alighted from. The truth

is they still can't do any proper work, but the way they run back and forth doing errands can make the crew burst out laughing, so they're very deeply loved.

The raw green fruit almost falls out, and the younger brother hurriedly presses it back into the sack before it drops out.

The older sister, full of smiles, takes out a pale blue envelope from her kitchen uniform. There's the recipient's name written on top with slightly stiff handwriting, and it's sealed.

"To Yuuri"

"A letter?"

Conrad asks, bending his knees to match their eye level, and the children pause for a beat before nodding in reply simultaneously. When he reaches out his left hand to accept the letter, something occurs to him suddenly, and so he says with a slight frown,

"But I'm not sure if I can meet Yuuri."

"But you will meet him someday."

The children's unsuspecting eyes are sparkling, and they have no intention of taking back the letter they held out. A gust of wind blows past them, then Lord Weller Conrad nods determinedly after a moment's thought,

"That's true."

And so, with expressions of happiness, the two put the thin letter into his hands.

Although he's little uneasy inside, worrying 'could this letter be written in the blood of livestock!?', Conrad still keeps the letter into his breast pocket, with the feelings of a postman,

"But if you two meet Yuuri before I do, remember to greet him for me."

He's not sure if they understand such a long sentence, but the two nod in unison.

On the way to Dai Shimaron, the merchant vessel Conrad is riding on stops at a port, a small city of commerce without any tourists. This vessel had just taken a spin around a few small countries, so if you want to savor a relaxing cruise, they're a good ship to sail with. However, to Lord Weller, who isn't a merchant, it's simply a waste of time.

He wants to return to Dai Shimaron as soon as possible, and there are things he must investigate as well, which is why he decided to change ships in this port. However, based on the information he just gleaned, there aren't any ships headed to Dai Shimaron today.

So, carrying the letter for Yuuri and the warmth left over from embracing the children, he steps forth in search of an inn to stay the night. It would be best if the place was near the port, he doesn't mind even if it's the second floor of a bar.

But his gaze is soon attracted by some loud yelling – turns out a middle-aged man is in conflict with a young man next to a docked boat. The younger man is dressed like a sailor, but as for the one glaring at him angrily, that short but broad-shouldered, extremely stocky middle-aged man, there's just no telling who he is at a glance.

He's holding a stack of cash notes amounting to a large sum in his hands. Maybe he's just naturally particular about money, because he keeps tapping the money with his finger in protest.

It seems something went wrong in the contract between the two, and now they're at loggerheads over the payment of damages and the work left to do.

He stops, observes the surroundings around the two, and finally understands.

There are about ten men standing a few steps away from the middle-aged man. Among them, some are casually stretching one foot forward, looking bored, while others are so restless it's driving them insane, so they start playing with their clothes. Most of them, however, are sagging their shoulders dejectedly, or staring at the ground with their heads lowered.

As though full of despair towards life, maybe even cursing their own lives.

Conrad can tell who they are immediately. Those people are wearing faded

grey clothes and cloth shoes, but there's a chain binding their right feet together, so they're obviously prisoners being transported.

They probably want to take a boat from this port to somewhere else. Surrounded by six armed soldiers, they don't even have the will to try and escape, all waiting obediently on the spot, powerless.

Except for one.

That extraordinary person is staring at the ocean with spirited eyes, his expression saying he will soon take his aim with him as he crosses the sea.

Only, the moment Conrad sees him, he can't help but rush forward. He rushes in between the prisoners, grabbing that man's thin clothing tightly. But since he brought too much momentum, both of them ended up colliding into a wall, the chains on that man's legs even clanking loudly.

"...Kinan!"

When that man hears someone say his name through clenched teeth, perhaps due to the suddenness of it, his eyes widen like saucers. But even that is but a moment, and he immediately reverts to his calm face,

"Your Excellency."

"Why are you here?"

That man called Kinan smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes,

"As you can see, I was apprehended for a menial crime."

"You're not the kind of person who would do something like that!"

"Hey!"

The soldier on watch prepares to come over and interrogate them, so Conrad disguises himself as an angry victim, yelling out at the same time,

"You all stay out of this! This guy conned my little sister and even took away all our money! I have to teach him a lesson, or I'll never get this off my chest!"

In reality, the one who victimized wasn't his little sister, and the thing that was taken away wasn't money, but it seems that Conrad's acting is working after all. The soldier on watch stops walking towards them, shaking his head,

“You poor thing. But this guy is headed for a prison in Darco for hurting someone with a knife in a bar, and once you’re there, you don’t get back for at least five years. If you tell your sister that, maybe she won’t feel so bad about it anymore.”

“But I still want him to apologize to my little sister.”

The soldier on watch shrugs exasperatedly, releasing the fingers that were holding his sword hilt,

“In any case, he can’t leave this place until the ship sets sail.”

Looks like the soldiers on watch won’t feel particularly upset if a mere prisoner gets hurt during transport. Wordlessly they return to their positions.

Conrad grabs that man’s chest again, so tightly he can only barely breathe,

“You were the one who shot Wolfram with an arrow, weren’t you?”

“My target wasn’t His Excellency.”

“But the one that fell was my little brother.”

“I deeply apologize.”

His teeth are starting to hurt from being clenched so tightly.

“And you nearly hit His Majesty.”

“I won’t.”

Even though he’s being scolded, Kinan still says proudly,

“With my skills, it’s not possible for me to make a mistake.”

“Even so!”

The man frowns, perhaps from the pain where his shoulder was rammed into the stone wall. For an instant, Conrad has the urge to grab his head and bang it into the wall, but eventually he curbs this thought,

“Then you were after Wolfram’s life?”

“I said my target wasn’t His Excellency, it was King Saralegui.”

“The Shou Shimaron king? Why?”

“I was hired. The ones who wanted to rebel, they hired me to kill the Shou Shimaron king with my arrows. But our plans were seen through by that crafty boy king, it seems.”

“You say you were hired? You think that excuse would save you? Even if it’s true, you still committed the greatest crime. Because you sniped your own king and his closest subordinates. No matter how brilliant a representative you find to help you fight your case, or how strong a protector emerges for you, none of it will work, because you have committed an unforgivable crime.”

“Please do not worry. I don’t have any connections in high places, I probably wouldn’t be able to escape the death sentence even if I went back to the country, and I knew this would happen from the very start.”

“You knew, and you still did it?”

In order not to attract the attention of the other prisoners, Conrad presses his voice down, but his left eyelid is trembling with fury.

This man is indeed... Lord Weller Conrad starts slowly going through the facts of the past in his heart.

This man did indeed contribute much as a mazoku soldier in the past Great Wars. He once fought to protect the country and the people, even swearing fealty to the king and Shinou, and he went through with his oath.

“...How could you have fallen to this point?”

“I didn’t fall, Your Excellency. I was always like this, I have been like since last Great War, only I’ve been resisting until now.”

“Were you always intent on betrayal? Abandoning your hometown, betraying your comrades, in order to gain material riches!?”

“To think Your Excellency would say something like this.”

The force gripping his chest loosens, and Kinan coughs lightly before repeating,

“To think that the Lord Weller who left the king, who left the kingdom would say something like this.”

As soon as Conrad lets go, Kinan’s back hits the wall forcefully, and he slides down the wall onto the ground. Even so, his gaze is trained on Lord Weller

standing in front of him, his unwavering actions proving even more how firm his gaze is.

“...I’m different from you.”

“Then tell me where you’re different. I hear you’re working for Dai Shimaron now.”

“Even so...”

Lord Weller bits down hard on his lip, because the words that come next aren’t easy to say. By the time he finally says them, the pain in his voice outweighs the anger,

“No matter where I am, that won’t change my home country. That is why I cannot forgive the person who hates that king and that country. That is also why I must hand him over to the mazoku, so he may return to the country and accept his just punishment.”

“In that case, please allow my older brother’s corpse to return.”

The man’s tone is still mild, as though he’s voicing some unattainable wish,

“My older brother who passed away in Shimaron, please let his corpse return to Shin Makoku.”

“What did you say?”

“If Your Excellency would be willing to recover my brother in my place, I believe he would be ecstatic to return home.”

Facing the gaze that was raised to look at him and that sudden request, Conrad is at a loss.

“I don’t hate you.”

Kinan lowers his voice so no one else can hear their conversation, but it just makes his words sound truer.

“His Excellency Lord Gwendal who let us return home safely was truly brilliant in his methods. If it weren’t for him, the war may have continued even to this day. And it’s also thanks to his tireless efforts in exchanging prisoners of war, that most of those prisoners of wars returned to their homeland alive.”

“That is indeed true.”

“His Excellency came purposely to the national borders to receive us prisoners, and I can’t forget the words he said to this day, ‘Raise your heads, people of the maou! You are soldiers to this day!’ There were even those who cried their eyes out at those words. Because after suffering under those extreme circumstances for so long, we had lost our dignity as soldiers.”

When it comes to those feelings, Conrad himself feels them all the way into his bones.

Once they’re relentlessly beaten up, and their dignities bruised by that torture, people become unable to protect their selves. At that point, they would throw away their emotion, kill their selves, and follow the enemy.

“I also heard about Your Excellency’s troop. A friend who was with you told me once, he said you did all you could to ‘bring everyone, the ones alive and the ones whose souls had already made the trip, back home’. Although that man lost a leg, he was still extremely proud to have fought by your side.”

That unseen wound is throbbing in pain, the wounds hidden deep in the heart never, ever heal.

Kinan sits on the dry land as he continues, his gaze moving away from Conrad and back to staring at the sea as he was earlier, “The ones who died on the battlefield returned home successfully, and the ones who lived to become prisoners were also rescued. But my brother was different... He should have been taken away, and sent to some holding facility. Back then I kept asking the wounded who were sent back, and the soldiers who were on and around the battlefield, to confirm that information. But after that there was nothing, I wonder, where was he sent to? Or did he die somewhere? Should I forget that he was my brother, and then stop searching? The prisoners who lived made it back, but the corpses that died on foreign soil didn’t. That’s only natural, even Dai Shimaron isn’t that kind-hearted. Even His Excellency, who made the first move to bring our men home, fretted over it. What conditions should we set? Or should we exchange them for something? Surely we can’t ask to exchange bodies? No matter what, it would be hard to believe that Dai Shimaron would accept these conditions.”

From between the docked ships, he could see the distant shores far away. Looking at the continent on the other side of the sea, he says,

“Where on earth are the soldiers who died in detention buried? Or were they simply thrown away? From that day on, I have always been searching for my older brother.”

“But the soul on its journey has long since...”

“I know, the soul has long since been reincarnated somewhere, and started a brand new life, I bet. Even so, in order to be rid of any regrets his life harbors towards its previous incarnation, I should even more bring my older brother’s body back to the land he grew up in, and pray to it properly. In order to fulfill that wish...”

Kinan brings his gaze back to Conrad,

“I don’t care who I have to suck up to, or where I have to infiltrate.”

“For that reason, you joined the Shou Shimaron rebellion movement?”

“That’s right. They promised me they would investigate a piece of land under central government, because eight years ago there was a small detention facility there. After the prisoners were released, that place became a prison.”

“You suspect your brother was there?”

Kinan pauses for a second after nodding, his gaze becoming very gentle, as though he may be mourning his family.

“Maybe you’re wondering why I’m doing all these things for a dead person, but for me, it’s not over yet.”

In that brief moment, he probably missed that man, who was a teacher, a friend, and also an older brother.

“Not over yet.”

As he tells the tragedy of what happened during his imprisonment, his eyes keep staring at the other end of the sea. That gaze is like that of a far-seeing eagle, announcing that it would definitely fulfill its dream.

The sailor who had been arguing with the middle-aged man yells as he returns

to his station, meaning they had come to an arrangement, and the ship transporting the prisoners would leave soon.

“You bastard, you still refuse to lower your head and apologize to my sister even now!?”

Conrad yanks Kinan’s hand roughly, pulling him back to his feet. The chains on his feet make a heavy sound, and the prisoners in front turn back, confused, but they’re probably unwilling to lure any trouble either, so they immediately turn back around.

“I can’t forgive you.”

The man with eyes as sharp as an eagle’s nods lightly,

“I have long since been mentally prepared for that.”

“But when it comes to searching for that which has been lost, we may stand in the same position. Just as you said.”

Conrad is searching, too. Even though he hasn’t decided who he would hand that to even if he found, he knows at the very least he wouldn’t give it to the ruler of Dai Shimaron.

If possible, he would like to end it all himself. He doesn’t want to give it to those endlessly greedy humans, the legendary monarch or his innocent master, he just wants to bury it himself, and the more he knows, the stronger that desire gets.

“Then why do you want to go to Darco this time?”

The soldier on watch said Kinan had hurt someone with a knife in a bar, but he is a man moving with an iron will and aim, so there’s no way he would make that mistake.

“You purposely caused this ruckus so you could be sent to that Darco prison?”

“That’s right, I hear the port city on water, Darco, is facing an imminent sinking crisis.”

“Sinking?”

In that time when Conrad was on Earth, he had heard about many similar

phenomena as well. Back then there was only a possibility of such things, and no one had found out the reason or a proper solution either. Still, the risks of the two shouldn't be the same, right?

"These past few years, the water level there kept rising, so it's said it's a matter of time before they sink. Strange, isn't it? It's not like that country is a floating object in the middle of a lake."

"That is indeed strange."

"But someone is interested in that phenomenon."

Just like in the beginning, Kinan lifts the corners of his mouth in a smile,

"The main business in that city on the water isn't fishing or tourism, but the prison, that prison with the huge, complete and high-class facilities that they're so proud of. They accept prisoners from countries without prisons, control them, and then receive money from those countries as counseling fees, that's how Darco was created. You should know about that, right?"

Even though Conrad is always travelling overseas, he's not very familiar with Darco's matters, and only knows about the prison after Kinan explains it.

It is so far away that the distance goes across the map, and its position is exactly on the other side from Shin Makoku, so the two countries don't have any ties and are unfamiliar with each other.

"That huge prison is everything to that country, you just have to infiltrate that place to know about Darco, and also..."

There is movement all around them suddenly, the soldiers and the middle-aged man start gathering the prisoners who had scattered and are bound by chains, Kinan glances at them briefly, and suddenly says quickly,

"The small countries under Shimaron rule had once sent prisoners to the Darco prison, which of course includes the few prisoners of war during the war, so there's no reason I shouldn't go... I take my leave, Your Excellency."

The prisoners bound by chains in front of him walk forward with their chains rattling, and the pulling at his right foot means Kinan has no choice but to walk towards the ship as well.

“Next time let us meet in Shin Makoku, although I may be standing on the executioner’s stage. Even so, I believe that by then my older brother would have already returned home.”

Conrad picks up his insubstantial luggage, and quickly counts the travel money he has on him. That middle-aged man with the broad shoulders seems to be very particular about money.

Instinctively he raises his head to look at the sky, the sun in the middle of sky shining relentlessly on him.

If you have to shine, why don’t you show me the way forward?

Why don’t you shine the best path for me to walk?

1. [↑](#) lit. Past few tens of days

Short story - In Greta's Mirror

In Greta's Mirror

鏡の中のグレッタ



Greta sits next to drowned-rat Yuuri as one-by-one wondrous things emerge from his pocket, each more exciting than the last.

He had just returned to the other world from Earth; his shoes and clothes and body and hair were all wet from the dirty pond water. Of course, his personal items inside his pocket were as well.

“What’s that?”

“Ah, that’s a 100 yen coin. It’s silver-colored but it’s not made of silver, so it’s not worth much. Do you want it? But if you want it for the decoration, I think a 5

yen or 50 yen coin might be better.”

“What’s that?”

“Ah, that’s a cough drop. When your throat is bothering you, it quickly calms the pain. Do you want it?”

He put a yellow package on the table. Greta shook her head.

“My throat doesn’t hurt... then Yuuri, this, what’s this?”

With his fingers he held up a completely soaked card. On the front a person’s face was printed in color, and on the back were several small numbers side-by-side. The owner, Yuuri, peered at it.

“It’s a professional baseball card. For the major league. I guess it’s my bad luck that I put it in my pocket. I only got it today.”

“Yuuri, look at this! Isn’t this amazing? This person, it’s really a picture but it looks just like him!”

“Ah, that’s because it’s a photograph. A photograph is a painting that looks more realistic. Do you want it? I don’t know the player on the card, so it’s of no use to me...huh, Greta? Greta, where did you go?”

“Hey, look, Anissina, I got this from Yuuri.”

While showing off the major league trading card, Greta spoke to her genius confidante.

On the front of the card a blond man was holding a bat, printed in full color.

“It’s amazing, right? It has a photograph. A photograph is different from a painting. Isn’t it, Anissina?”

And she wanted a photograph of her mother, Greta said.

“From the very beginning, I never remembered father very much. But mother is different... the last time we met, she grabbed Greta’s shoulder and said. ‘I’m so happy,’ she said. Her, her face from that time...”

Anissina touched the little girl’s face with the palm of her hand, wiping overflowing tears away with her finger.

“The face from that time... that memory is steadily fading away. Greta loves Yuuri and Wolf and Anissina and Gwen, and Conrad and Günter, and everybody in this castle, but, but I still can’t forget something like my mother, but the image of her face keeps disappearing from my mind.”

“Greta.”

“Yes.”

From where her forehead was pressed against Anissina’s good-smelling shoulder, Greta’s muffled voice replied.

“With demon methods it is possible to do something like taking a photograph, but taking one of your mother would be extremely difficult. A normal photograph recreates the scene in front of the lens without change. Demon techniques can’t project an image inside somebody’s head.”

Greta sobbed in despair, but nodded her assent.

After that she went to her most beloved people one after another, asking everybody the same question. And one after another each mazoku reliably gave the same response.

Greta returned to Yuuri’s room and waited impatiently while her beloved family hugged her, then led her by the hand to Wolfram’s room.

“Wolfram will paint a picture of your mother from her childhood.”

“Childhood?”

“Yeah. Greta’s mother and the current you are painted pretty much the same.”

Greta sat on a large stool for several hours in the same position without moving.

Wolfram, closing one eye and measuring the length with a writing brush, painted a picture with strong-smelling paint.

“We can’t take a photograph of your mother, but we can paint a portrait. After this we can make one each year. When Greta is an adult, surely the mother from

your memories will be almost exactly like the one in the portrait.”

“Really?”

“Really. Because Greta is her beloved mother’s daughter, right? But-”

Yuuri quickly lowered his voice and whispered in Greta’s ear. He felt around in his pocket again and pulled out a small mirror with a light-blue border, putting it in the smiling Greta’s palm.

“It’s a secret from Wolf.”

“Yeah, a secret from Wolf.”

Greta didn’t know whether or not the completed picture actually resembled her mother. That wasn’t because Greta was forgetting her mother’s face; it was definitely because Wolfram’s artistic style was so incredibly abstract that there was no distinction between a person and a tanuki.

Nevertheless she hung the portrait in her room, and spoke to it every morning without fail. But ever after that, Greta wished for a portrait or photograph of her mother.

And every time she used the tiny mirror, she remembered.

Short story - The Moon is Ours

The Moon is Ours

月をほぐらの
このなかに



“I want the moon.”

When an innocent younger brother asked a cute thing like that, an older brother in any time or place would definitely grant that wish.

Shibuya Shouri was also like that.

“I want the moon!”

Late at night when the whole family was sleeping, his three-year-old younger brother abruptly rose from his pillow and brandished his arms at the sky. Giving

a sidelong glance to his taken-aback older brother, he jumped down from his bed, approaching the window to the balcony.

“Hey, Yuu-chan, don’t do that.”

Outside of the window was pitch-black central park. Completely dark other than the high-rise buildings of Manhattan that never sleep and the lovely moon, the dead of night was definitely not a landscape where a three-year-old toddler should be playing. All the more if his guardian is an eight-year-old.

“You can see it from inside the room, right? Look, we can pull back the curtains.”

“I don’t wanna see it. I want it.”

“You want it, huh? Why?”

He opened the curtains and raised the window, through which the perfect sphere shone. Rather than seeing the moon of their home on the other side of the ocean, the moon of a foreign country rose above them.

The younger brother slipped past the older one’s arm, threw open the door to the living room, and got a large paper grocery bag. He spread it with both tiny hands, grabbed it by the edges and waved it overhead.

“You can’t catch the moon with a paper bag.”

“Why not?”

Oh, wow. Shouri sighed with a bitter smile and hung his glasses on the side of his bed.

Yuuri was an obedient and adorable little brother, but he could be a little dense. He still believed that Santa Claus really came down the chimney, and he was convinced that a human being could catch the moon. It can’t be helped, since he’s five years younger. After all, when he remembered himself when he was three, being like this was okay, right? He was becoming just a little bit anxious.

“Wait a minute. Don’t open the window, okay.”

Shouri left with that final word, walking towards the master bedroom with footsteps as stealthy as a kitten, and got a black salad bowl. He filled it to

overflowing with water and walked back very carefully.

Yuuri flopped down onto the shag carpet, waiting to see his smart big brother's tactics. His wide eyes were staring at the moon, full of joy.

Shouri placed the bowl on the floor next to the window, causing ripples in the water's surface, so that the moon was reflected. The bowl shook and made small waves.

"Look at that."

"Wow!"

The little brother's face shone and his lips parted; he looked like he would start crying soon.

"... it's not there."

He had thrust his finger in, and the figure of the moon in the water had disappeared.

"Yuu-chan, you can't hold the moon, you know."

"But."

He snorted like he was about to start weeping, while his small hand shifted the water disconsolately.

"I want to play catch."

"With the moon!?"

"Yeah."

For a moment Shouri cursed his father for teaching the toddler about baseball. But that feeling was corrected immediately as he dug madly through his younger brother's toy box, making a mess.

"I'm going to play catch with Shou-chan. With the moon."

At last, inside a vinyl glove, Shouri found something soft and yellow that he held up to his little brother's face.

"Yuu-chan, look, it's the moon."

No response. For the sake of making it look more like the real thing, Shouri

drew strange patterns on with permanent marker.

“See? They’re craters.”

Even less of a response. So Shouri changed his plan; in order to bring out the fantasy-fairy tale atmosphere, he drew the image of a dancing animal.

“It’s the rabbit on the moon.”

“A rabbit?”

Now sure that he had earned a favorable response, Shouri let out a sigh of relief.

He placed the ball in his little brother’s tiny hand, clasping his fingers tightly.

“It’s Yuu-chan’s moon.”

Three-year-old Yuuri stared intently at his smart big brother; after a short time he rose his voice, setting the moon on his lap and picking up a hard ball.

He took a red magic marker, and drew a clumsy shape on the sphere.

A starfish? The big brother guessed it was something like that. Yuuri spent some time filling inside the lines with red.

When the person himself had finished his important work, he held it out with a satisfied nod.

“Here!”

Then, sounding very proud, he said, “It’s Shou-chan’s star!”

In the middle of his dusty luggage, Shouri discovered a memento from more than ten years ago. In a nostalgic mood, he called out to his little brother as they passed in the hallway.

My little brother has become a high school student, huh? And all of his childish charm is gone. He held the ball with the red star drawn on it at Yuuri’s eye level.

“Yuu-chan, look at this. Do you remember it?”

Thereupon the younger brother wrinkled his brow, and if it were the old days he would have put his small palm on his older brother’s forehead.

His face was filled with confusion and sympathy.

“Hey, Shouri, it’s been years since we played Dragon Ball together, hasn’t it?”

God, I don’t want the moon anymore. I wish my little brother was the way he used to be.